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Gita the mother

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# GITA THE MOTHER

M. K. GANDHI

EDITED BY  
JAG PARVESH CHANDER

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**“Early in my childhood I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve as an unfailing guide through the temptations of life. The Vedas could not fill the need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the Gita, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the Shastras and the Upanishads. That decided me. I learn Sanskrit to enable me to read the Gita. To-day the Gita is not only my Bible or my Koran it is more than that—IT IS MY MOTHER. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago, but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom.”**

**M. K. GANDHI.**



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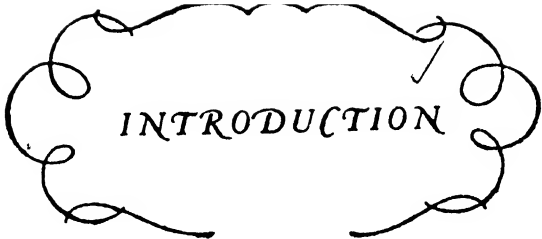
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## INTRODUCTION

**T**O some Gandhiji is a political agitator and a propagandist of the Western type under the guise of an ascetic, to some he is an incorrigible social reformer who would not even listen to the Divine sanctity in the books worshipped as the inspired word of God. To others he appears a staunch, bigoted Sanatanist Hindu, trying to Hinduise India, firstly, by purging Hinduism of all the impurities and blemishes which it has absorbed, and secondly, by preaching unceasingly the *dharma* of *Ahimsa* and Cow-protection. But to devotees like me he is a prophet showing the way to Truth through Non-violence both by precept and example. This claim to prophetship is indiscriminately ridiculed by his opponents, vehemently disclaimed time and again by the Mahatma himself, and yet with equal vigour acclaimed by his devoted and humble followers. He is a prophet in the same sense that Christ is the only begotten son of God. God allows Himself to be worshipped as Father, Mother, and even Wife. Evidently Christ was the purest man of his times and a great and selfless servant and teacher of humanity. This brought him nearest to God, hence the epithet "the only begotten son of God." Gandhiji says, "Metaphorically we are all begotten sons of God, but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense. Thus for me Chaitanya may be the only begotten son of God." Gandhiji by living a life of truth, of utmost purity, of complete self-effacement and humility, and, by literally dissolving himself in the service of the "lowliest and the last," has expressed in human idiom the Supreme Spirit that pervades and controls this Universe. As Gandhiji himself says, "there is an Urdu

saying which means 'Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine.' And therefore, he who is the most religiously behaved, has the most of the Divine spark in him." To-day he is nearest to God in comparison with us though he is as yet very very far off as far as his own ideal is concerned. God, as the Guardian Mother, gives him strength, when he is weak, in the form of spiritual food, when he is fasting to bear the cross of our sins—shows him the light "amidst the encircling gloom" and guides him through the "still small voice" within, when doubts haunt him.

If God guides him, then why did he commit the Himalayan blunder of leading India on the path of mass Civil Disobedience without first preparing the country fully for non-violence through the indispensable constructive programme? The explanation to my mind is as simple as his action is bewildering. This happened twenty-one years ago. Firstly, he had not done enough *bhagti* to evoke full Divine guidance, or his devotion was not deep enough to enable him to interpret the Divine messages. Secondly, in his one-pointed zeal for "Swaraj within a year" he thought that the country was prepared for the fight. God warned him through a series of acts of mob violence but he did not heed it and did not read the Divine Signals. At long last the Chauri Chaura riots showed him the error of his way and without caring for the feelings of his followers and the ridicule of his opponents, he, like a man, admitted the error, took the blame on himself, and as a brave soldier retraced his steps and started preparing for the future fight through self-purification as embodied in the constructive programme. Then take his recent "bungle" at Rajkot. His fast was correct. He had to pin his reliance on God and through self-suffering melt the heart of the Prince and show him the error of his ways. But he appealed to the Viceroy for intervention. He had no business to do so. For a moment he had lost faith in God and succumbed to the wishes of the flesh, as he wanted to live. This very flesh he has been trying throughout his life to control and yet at that time he submitted to its wishes. That is why he says that, as yet, he is very far from God. The nearer one is to the flesh, the farther one is from the Goal. But the greatest strength of Gandhiji lies in frankly admitting his errors without caring for

unpopularity. Very recently, he admitted his "wrong" interpretation of the Bombay resolutions. All this baffles his co-workers, strengthens the hands of his opponents who denounce his leadership, but yet brings him nearer to us by reminding us that after all he is like us—an erring mortal. But unlike us he is striving every moment of his life to become one with God by serving his fellow men by inviting penances on his own body and by expiating our untold sins with his own suffering. All this irresistibly makes my pen write, "He is the only begotten son of God for US." Intellect in this controversial matter creates doubts, makes the mind waver, but faith born of love says, "He is a prophet." Some time back Dr. Gopichand, who is profoundly respected as a sincere follower of Gandhiji, took me to Wardha. I had the unique opportunity of having an interview with Gandhiji. It was a rare and inexpressible joy to be at the feet of the Master who had unfolded through his inspiring writings the vision of a new life. It has been nothing short of a re-birth. At Wardha we were the guests of the late Jamnalal Bajaj. When I saw Jamnalalji at Sevagram, I frankly thought that he was Acharya Kirpalani. I had not met either of them personally. Jail life at Jaipur had made him of the proverbial thinness of the Congress Secretary. A fellow guest was Dr. Rajendra Prasad who gave me a foreword for my book, *The Teachings of Mahatma Gandhi*, which has recently been published. I have yet to meet (barring my dearest friend Comrade Bedi), a more considerate and affectionate soul. Rajen Babu, as he is affectionately called, seems to take you under his fatherly protection as the hen takes its little ones under its feathers. Regarding my pertinent question about my faith in Gandhiji's prophetship, he with a child-like smile said, "There is a sharp difference of opinion but the Lord is the *Bhagat* of His *bhagats* and Gandhiji has done a lot of *bhagti*." That satisfied me and put me at rest.

Each one of us can be a prophet in the sense that Gandhiji is regarded as such by his followers. Every student has to study the books prescribed and work hard to pass an examination. Similarly in this University of the Spirit whose Chancellor is God Himself one has to study and work harder still. The most important papers of the University of the

Universities are Right Knowledge, Devotion, Self-Effacement, Humility and Selfless Service coupled with purity of life in thought, word and deed. Means and ends are not two different things. The extreme of means is the end itself.

Now the question arises, what is the "Text Book" which Gandhiji reads and which has moulded, influenced, and guided his private and public life? It is the *Bhagwad Gita*. Gandhiji says, "It has been my endeavour as also that of some of my companions to reduce to practice the teaching of the *Gita* as I have understood it. The *Gita* has become for us a spiritual reference book. I am aware that we ever fail to act in perfect accord with its teachings. The failure is not due to want of effort but it is in spite of it. Even through the failures we seem to see rays of hope." Then he says, "This book is regarded as unrivalled for its spiritual merit." At another place he writes, "Early in my childhood I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve as an unfailing guide through the temptations of life. The *Vedas* could not fill the need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the *Gita*, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the *Shastras* and the *Upanishads*. That decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the *Gita*. To-day the *Gita* is not only my *Bible* or my *Koran* it is more than that—it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago, but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom."

But all these tributes do not mean that he accepts *Gita* as the only inspired book and regards the books of other religions as fit only to be criticised and even condemned. He says, "I have not been able to see any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the *Bhagwad Gita*. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, the *Bhagwad Gita* reduces to a scientific formula. To-day supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its content but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy

from it as I do from the *Gita*." And then he says, "I have no hesitation in regarding the *Koran* as revealed as I have none in regarding the *Bible*, the *Zend Avesta*, the *Granth Sahib* and any other clean scripture as revealed. Revelation is the exclusive property of no nation, no tribe." But still *Gita* is *Gita* and he admits to a Muslim friend, "I can pay full respect to the *Koran* and the Prophet, why do you ask me to reject the *Vedas* and the incarnations? They have helped me to be what I am, I find the greatest consolation in the *Bhagawad Gita* and *Tulsidas Ramayana*. I frankly confess that the *Koran* and the *Bible* and the other scriptures of the world do not move me as do the *Gita* of Krishna and the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas." And he frankly admits and says, "I must tell you in all humility that Hinduism as I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the *Bhagawad Gita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, nor that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep impression upon me, but I confess to you that, when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagawad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies, and if they had not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teachings of the *Bhagawad Gita*." All these are not contradictory statements. There is no shadow of diversity but only a full-blooded unity and an abiding firmness of faith, coupled with a catholic outlook.

The equality of all religions is the basis of his beliefs, the corner-stone of the Law of Love which is the law of our being and the only solution for "warring creeds." If Islam or Christianity is dear to some, Hinduism is dear to others. He says, "The Allah of Islam is the same as the God of the Christians and the *Ishwara* of the Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are many names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate an individuality but attributes, and little man has tried to describe mighty God by giving him attributes, though He is above attributes, Indescribable, Immeasurable. Living faith in God means acceptance

of the brotherhood of man. It also means equal respect for all religions." All religions are true and yet equally imperfect, because the word of God passes through the hands of the human prophet and suffers distortion at the hands of imperfect interpreters. The sum total of all religions is *certainly* inspired. And in order to pick up the jewels of Truth and the diamonds of Right Conduct, which may be surrounded by stones of prejudices and immoral practices he does not literally accept every word that is found in the inspired books, but exercises his God-given reason on the touchstone of Truth and Non-violence. Anything that contradicts Truth and conflicts with Non-violence is peremptorily rejected. The immoral practice of untouchability which is the very negation of Truth and the antithesis of Non-violence is summarily dismissed. He says, "*Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them." And the *Gita's* teaching is unmistakable..... "Sages look with equal eye on a *Brahman*, rich with learning and culture, or a cow or even an elephant, on a dog or an eater of dogs." Who knows if we are not the pariahs of the British Empire because we, under the hypnotic influence of self-imposed superiority and under the delirium of shameless arrogance, have, in a brutal manner treated one-fifth of our nation as untouchables fit only to be shunned, despised and kicked? "As we sow, so shall we reap," is not a mere copy-book maxim.

Now what is the central teaching of the Book of Life? The fulcrum around which the 700 verses revolve is desirelessness. Do your work as duty *par excellence* but renounce the fruits of action. Gandhiji says, "This desirelessness is the central sun around which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words how can one be free from action and the taint of sin? The *Gita* has answered the question in decisive language: "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating

all activities to God—by surrendering oneself to Him, body and soul.” But this supreme virtue of desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere asking, neither is it attained by an intellectual feat but it is a matter of constant heart-churning. Gandhiji says, “Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realisation. This self-realisation is the subject of the *Gita* as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realisation. That matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of action.”

This common everyday practice of hankering after results is the source of all ills and the mother of all malpractices. When a person's mind is dominated by an intense desire to achieve the results of his action, he will not care for the means. Then again he will be in an unnecessary haste. Speaking from the purely practical point of view, the devotion and whole-heartedness that is required in the prosecution of the object will be swayed by haste, nervousness and passions. These will adversely affect the action itself. Action is to be carried out with all one's strength, vigour, and devotion but with complete detachment. Why do we find so many cases of “nervous breakdowns” and a host of other nervous diseases? It is seldom one sees a face free from worry. If we just look back and do a little bit of self-introspection, and turn the searchlight inwards, we find the root cause is attachment. A little upset business, or a minor mishap in the family or a trivial misunderstanding with friends is taken as a catastrophe and our little world is shaken. Over small things we fret and fume like maniacs. Worry becomes our sole object, grumbling our profession, cursing our fate, blaming others our mission in life. This is no exaggeration. Perhaps we have become a part of the vicious circle and do not even feel and realise this death-dance. Attachment, worry, haste affect our nervous system and upset the balance of our mind. Gradually these unnatural guests with whom we were just dallying become members of our family and will not leave us. Anybody who follows *Gita* as Gandhiji wants us to do will never for a moment find an occasion for worry. Success

and failure and even life and death become two sides of the same coin. One does not discriminate between friends and foes. What does it matter if a person succeeds for the time being in tearing from one something one respects, loves and worships? It is one's own right conduct that matters and not the despicable behaviour of another. Anyway, why hanker after the results and brood over the means? Steadfast love and silent devotion is its own reward. To be able to rise above the pairs of opposites is a blissful joy in itself.

When great and high-souled Christians come to India, they usually visit Gandhiji and pay their homage. Their earnest desire is to learn from a Hindu how to lead a true Christian life. One thing they admire most is his peace of mind. It is the *Gita* which has made him rise above the pairs of opposites and taken him into the heavenly abode of peace, joy and plenty.

I have read *Gita* dozens of times and reverently tried to follow the interpretation of Gandhiji. His interpretation is to my mind the soundest and the most correct. To translate the teachings into one's own life, one has to look to those who do. For the actual practice of the *Gita* teaching I look to one who was neither born a Hindu nor in India—Mrs. Freda Bedi. Her life, as she lives it, I find one long commentary on the Divine Song. In her actions I read the meaning of a verse of it. She is one of the most active persons I have met. Her devotion to work as a professor or as a political worker is inspiring. Desirelessness reigns supreme. Her husband was at Deoli and was a detenu in the Gujrat Jail, her mother is in London, she had no home those days except a room in the college hostel. In spite of these adverse circumstances, she is a picture of contentment which is the very essence of happiness. Although born in the country of our rulers, she has made India her home and is fighting the battle of freedom for the land which she has taken as her own.

The poverty of India moves her much more than it moves those among whom she lives. Perhaps we have always lived in the land of dung-heaps and living skeletons where once flowed "rivers of milk and honey." Once we went to a school conducted without praise or profit by an earnest young man for the



children of road-menders, poor exiles from Rajputana, and her eyes were wet seeing the soul-killing poverty of those little ones, their dried-up skins and wretched clothes, the mud-huts behind them. They sang, a song "Our mother is India, we worship her, we are her devotees." Poverty, dirtiness, and ignorance are sides of the same triangle. As we drove back, she said, "It almost makes me cry to hear these children singing about India, and how they worship her. What has India done for them, poor, neglected creatures? We must make an India worthy of their worship where everyone, even the least of the children, will be cared for."

When in my childhood I heard the *Ramayana* recited in Dusehra festivals, it was my desire to see a living Sita as described by Tulsidas. When I see admiration for her in the eyes of other women, I feel it is because they see in her the qualities of Sita.

Some might think that as she is the wife of my dearest friend, it makes my devotion blind. To think this way is not to know her, and to say that is to misunderstand her. Maybe I see sunshine where there is only twilight but before the fire of faith, even the steel of reason would melt.

In her I find all the qualities of a devotee as described by Gandhiji..... "He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit good or bad, who treats friends and foes alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason."

Over and above, before the life-giving sunshine of her affectionate sisterly smile, the mist of one's worry and sorrow disappears. In her company I feel the same comfort and happiness as a devotee feels in a temple, a mosque or a church. Even in our pitiable slavery we feel proud that "one of our rulers" is

trying her best to deliver us from this soul-killing bondage. God in his mercy sends a ray of hope and sunshine amidst the threatening gloom of helplessness and darkness. If we all suffer and work as she does, once again Mother India, whom we have for the time being forsaken, will be ours. The Mother is longing to take all of us into her lap again but we are still unworthy of being her children.

It is really strange that this Book of Life which is respected by every Hindu as a book of unrivalled spiritual merit is interpreted by some as teaching *Ahimsa* and by equally sincere people as sanctioning *Himsa*. Gandhiji derives the theory and practice of life-giving *Ahimsa* from his Spiritual Dictionary. Desirelessness, renunciation and detachment are the central teachings of the *Gita*. Now, is desirelessness compatible with *Himsa*? A little understanding of the doctrine of desirelessness convinces us beyond doubt that *Himsa* and desirelessness are as apart as the north pole is from the south pole. If *Himsa* is followed, detachment is impossible to practice. It is only through complete non-violence that genuine detachment is possible. It is true that the background of the *Gita* is warfare. But the author brought in warfare to make his themes more vivid. In second chapter there is not a word about *Himsa* in the definition of the "perfect Man" and it does not teach any rules of warfare. Anger, passions, lust and attachment are taboos and *Himsa* is in a way a composition of these qualities and the inevitable result of these.

Then, in the end, the author makes both the victors and the vanquished shed bitter tears of sorrow and repentance. Moreover when Krishna asks Arjuna to commit violence we must not forget that it is God Himself who is speaking. He is the Creator and the Destroyer. Either we admit that Krishna is the Supreme Being Himself or not. This ticklish question of *Ahimsa* and *Himsa* becomes clear as soon as we decide the status ascribed to Krishna. God has not given man the power to create and thus he has no right to destroy. Everything that lives is the manifestatoin of the Soul. The Soul is one and every man, beast, or member of the vegetable kingdom is a part of it.

To-day we must see the doctrine and practice of violence at

its peak and perfection. What is the result? Truth was the first casualty of the war. Violence killed Truth. And anything that kills Truth aims to destroy God Himself for God is Truth, or, more correctly speaking, Truth is God.

In conclusion I must thank my friend Prof. Abdul Mujid Khan for giving me every facility for studying and taking the relevant material from his precious old files of the *Harijan*. Without his active and ungrudging co-operation it would not have been possible to compile this book. To be in his company is to read *Harijan*, to listen to him is to know something illuminating about Gandhiji and to study his life as he lives it is to find Hindu-Muslim unity in action for he firmly believes in the equality of all religions.

It is my earnest desire that this book will be as popular as its sister publication, *The Unseen Power*, the first edition of which I sold out within three months of its publication.

**JAG PARVESH CHANDER**

## CHAPTER I

### The Message of the Gita

(IT was at Kosai in Almora, that on 24th June, 1929, *i. e.*, after two years' waiting, that I finished the introduction in Gujrati to my translation of the *Gita*. The whole was then published in due course. It has been translated in Hindi, Bengali and Marathi. There has been an insistent demand for an English translation. I finished the translation of the introduction at the Yervada Prison. Since my discharge it has lain with friends and now I give it to the reader. Those who take no interest in the Book of Life will forgive the trespass on these columns. To those who are interested in the poem and treat it as their guide in life, my humble attempt might prove of some help.—M K.G.)

#### I

Just as acted upon by the affection of co-workers like Swami Anand and others, I wrote *My Experiments with Truth*, so has it been regarding my rendering of the *Gita*. "We shall be able to appreciate your meaning of the message of the *Gita* only when we are able to study a translation of the whole text by yourself with the addition of such notes as you may deem necessary. I do not think it is just on your part to deduce *Ahimsa*, etc. from stray verses," thus spoke Swami Anand to me during the non-co-operation days. I felt the force of his remarks. I therefore told him that I would adopt his suggestion when I got the time. Shortly afterwards, I was imprisoned. During my incarceration I was able to study the *Gita* more fully. I went reverently through the Gujrati translation of the Lokamanya's great work. He had kindly presented me with the Marathi original and the translation in Gujrati and Hindi, and had asked me if I could not tackle the original, at least to go through the Gujrati translation.

I had not been able to follow the advice outside the prison walls. But when I was imprisoned I read the Gujarati translation. This reading whetted my appetite for more and I glanced through several works on the *Gita*.

2. My first acquaintance with the *Gita* began in 1888-89 with the verse translation by Sir Edwin Arnold known as *The Song Celestial*. On reading it I felt a keen desire to read a Gujarati translation. And I read as many translations as I could lay hold of. But all such readings can give me no passport for presenting my own translation. Then, again, my knowledge of Sanskrit is limited, my knowledge of Gujarati too, is in no way scholarly. How could I then dare present the public with my translation.

3. It has been my endeavour as also that of some companions to reduce to practice the teaching of the *Gita* as I have understood it. The *Gita* has become for us a spiritual reference book. I am aware that we ever fail to act in perfect accord with the teaching. The failure is not due to want of effort, but is in spite of it. Even through the failures we seem to see rays of hope. The accompanying rendering contains the meaning of the *Gita* message which this little band is trying to enforce in its daily conduct.

4. Again this rendering is designed for women, the commercial class, the so-called *Shudras* and the like, who have little or no literary equipment, who have neither the time nor the desire to read the *Gita* in the original, and yet who stand in need of its support. In spite of my Gujarati being unscholarly, I must owe to having the desire to leave to the Gujaratis, through the mother tongue, whatever knowledge I may possess. I do indeed wish that at a time when literary output of a questionable character is pouring in upon the Gujaratis, they should have before them a rendering, that the majority can understand, of a book that is regarded as unrivalled for its spiritual merit and so withstand the overwhelming flood of unclean literature.

5. This desire does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings. They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the *Gita* in their own lives. At the back of my reading there

is the claim of an endeavour to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of 40 years. For this reason I do indeed harbour the wish that all Gujarati men or women wishing to shape their conduct according to their faith, should digest and derive strength from the translation here presented.

6. My co-workers, too, have worked at this translation. My knowledge of Sanskrit being very limited, I should not have full confidence in my literal translation. To that extent therefore the translation has passed before the eyes of Vinoba, Kaka Kalekar, Mahadev Desai and Kishorilal Mashruvala.

## II

7. Now about the message of the *Gita*.

3. Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not an historical work but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the *Mahabharata* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

9. The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

10. In this great work the *Gita* is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with

the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

11. Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified, but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

12. In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to truth. There is an Urdu saying which means "*Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine.*" And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought that Krishna enjoys in Hinduism the status of the most perfect incarnation.

13. This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realisation. This self-realisation is the subject of the *Gita*, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realisation. That, which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the *Gita* even at the risk of repetition.

14. That matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of action.

15. This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there

is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words, how can one be free from action, *i. e.*, from the taint of sin? The *Gita* has answered the question in decisive language: "*By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i. e., by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul.*"

16. But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the *Vedas* from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the *Gita* has insisted on devotion accompanying it, and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the *Gita*, "*Have devotion and knowledge will follow.*" This devotion is not mere lip worship, it is wrestling with death. Hence the *Gita's* assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

17. Thus the devotion required by the *Gita* is no soft hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the *Gita* has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead-marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none who is a fount of mercy who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with



the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

18. We thus see that to be a real devotee is to realise oneself. Self-realisation is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of the exchange. They are themselves the things we want. In other words, if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the *Gita* is perfect peace.

19. But such knowledge and devotion, to be true have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions a mere learned man will pass as a *pandit*. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting of a *lota*.

20. Or take *Bhakti*. The popular notion of *Bhakti* is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads, etc., might be interrupted. This *Bhakta* therefore leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

21. But the *Gita* says : “ *No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If ever I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large is to engage in action ?*”

22. While on the one hand it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other hand it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work—whether they will or not. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is to be included in the term action. Then how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting ? The manner in which the *Gita* has solved the problem is to my knowledge, unique. The *Gita* says : “ *Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward and work.*”

This is the unmistakable teaching of the *Gita*. He who gives up action, falls. He who gives up only the reward, rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

23. Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The *Gita* reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the *Gita* is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says good-bye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he therefore resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.

24. From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit the author of the *Gita* discovered the path of renunciation of fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "*One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits, religion is only for attainment of salvation,*" we hear many wordly wise people say. In my opinion the author of the *Gita* has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and wordly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our wordly pursuits. I have felt that the *Gita* teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day to day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the *Gita*, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many

a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

25. Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the *Gita*, one is bound to follow Truth and *Ahimsa*. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *Himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the *Gita* was not written to establish *Ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the *Gita* age. The *Gita* had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the 2nd chapter.

26. But if the *Gita* believed in *Ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *Ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *Ahimsa*.

27. In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *Ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the *Gita*. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible that in the age prior to that of the *Gita* offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita* sense. In the *Gita* continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means

body labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice but never animal sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sannyasa*, undergone in the *Gita*, a transformation. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet not work. Thus the author of the *Gita* by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted that, according to the letter of the *Gita*, it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I have, in all humility felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *Ahimsa* in every shape and form.

28. The *Gita* is not an aphoristic work, it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

29. Nor is the *Gita* a collection of Do's and Don'ts. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

30. The *Gita* has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect, it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore the *Gita* is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say :

"Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me. And those who being free from malice, will, with faith, absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."

Young India : August 6, 1931.

## ‘The Poor in Spirit’

**F**OR over a year, practically, we have been like birds wandering from their nests, and it was with a positive feeling of relief that we returned to the *Ashram*. Thanks to the decision of the All-India Spinners’ Association, the impending tours in February and March have been for the time being cancelled, so as to give Gandhiji an unbroken period of quiet time at the *Ashram*.

The quiet time, however, does not mean lack of work. It is a time of “toil unsevered from tranquillity,” of communings with the inmates of the *Ashram* and of self-examination. Among the many problems that we have to face in the *Ashram* one is that of malaria which visits us regularly every year after the end of the monsoon. Doctors have been consulted as to the causes and the means of prevention, and one of the usual means suggested is protection from mosquitoes with the help of a mosquito-net. “How can all afford a mosquito-net? Is there no means which the poorest can afford?” Gandhiji seems to have asked the doctors, who said there was one. That is keeping the body properly covered, and smearing the face with kerosene oil. Gandhiji generally uses the mosquito-net, but as soon as he saw that there was a poor man’s remedy, he asked the net to be removed and has been smearing his face with kerosene oil before bed-time. ‘The poor in spirit’ of the beatitudes are not the poor who cannot afford a thing but those who, affording the thing, deny themselves its use because the poor cannot afford it.

Another and much more forcible illustration occurred during the same week. “I have to give you this evening an instance of a folly of which three of us have an equal share,”

said Gandhiji at one of our prayer meetings. "Or rather my share is the biggest inasmuch as I, as the head of the *Ashram*, am expected to be much more vigilant than any one of you." Many of us could not imagine what this would be. But he narrated it in vivid and, as he is wont to describe his mistakes, in exaggerated detail. Those who have seen Gandhiji's room in the *Ashram* will remember that between the wall which faces the river and the roof there is a piece of lattice work. It is meant for ventilation, but it also lets in the sun's rays straight on Gandhiji's face. So he asked one of us to put something there as a screen. This friend asked another who immediately brought in the carpenter with a board. He naturally thought a shutter would be better than a screen, and asked if Gandhiji would like it. Gandhiji agreed, but soon after the carpenter began his work, he seems to have perceived that he had not done the right thing. So he began to think aloud. He first told the friends who had been sharers in the mistake, then the ladies whom he meets every morning for half an hour, and finally the prayer meeting. "Now this is not what we who are pledged to poverty may do. It ought to have occurred to me that a piece of card-board or a piece of cloth would serve as well as this shutter which costs a couple of rupees and three hours' labour for the carpenter. The cardboard or the piece of old cloth would have cost nothing and anyone could have fixed it there with a couple of nails. It is in these simple little things that our creed is tested. The Kingdom of Heaven is for those who are poor in spirit. Let us therefore learn at every step to reduce our needs and wants to the terms of the poor and try to be truly poor in spirit."

We have hymns every morning and evening, and usually it is Khare Shastri, our music teacher, who conducts the prayer and sings the hymns. During his absence in Madras, however, Pandit Totaramji, who has a storehouse of Kabir's songs, had been conducting the prayers, and one morning he gave a very sweet song which none of us had heard before. After the evening prayers Gandhiji asked the children if anyone could say what song they had heard in the morning. None of them could say, and that gave Gandhiji an opportunity of giving us a brief sermon on prayer and on the song itself. "Well, I do not

remember the exact words of the song," he said, "But no one can forget the substance of the song. It is not only the music but the substance that has been haunting me the whole day. You do not come to prayer to listen to music, or to admire this man's or that man's voice but in order that you may carry with you for the day something from what you hear to guide and inspire you in all your actions. If we do not do so, all our prayer would be like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. What a great song was to-day's! Kabir in his homely telling way has described the treasures of the humble. 'It is not he that exalteth himself, but he that humbleth himself that shall see God,' says Kabir. We have to be humble like the ant and not proud like the elephant." But I give the song itself:

"Only he who humbleth himself will find the Lord.

"It is no use your going to the weaver with coarse yarn and asking for fine cloth from him.

"Hard earth is no use to the potter, unless he beats it into very fine powder for clay. Then and then only can it be fit for the wheel.

"An elephant will try in vain to pick up the grains of sugar scattered in grains of sand. But an ant will easily pick them up. Humble thyself therefore.

"For he who exalteth himself shall such be crushed. But," says Kabir, "he who humbleth himself shall find God."

The evening talk, whenever he gives one, is devoted to topics arising out of the everyday life of the members. The morning ones are almost always about some thought or other from the *Gita*. No elaborate comment. Just a few words or sentences on the chapter recited, to serve as a sort of approach to the chapter. For instance: "Chapter Nine contains what I would describe as the healing balm for us afflicted mortals—afflicted not only with physical ills but with ills of the spirit. The chapter continues the promise of God to all erring mortals, nay, even to those who may be 'born from the very womb of Sin.' Those that turn to Him shall have no cause to grieve. The chapter also shows that the *Gita* was written when *varnashrama* had ceased to exist in its pristine purity and had come to mean,

as it does to-day, a classification of high and low. Let us forget that and remember that the promise is given to all *apicheth suduracharo* even if they be steeped in sin. And when we are all steeped in sin, more or less, who dare cast the stone at whom? 'Be thou certain, none can perish, trusting Me,' says the Lord, but let it not be understood to mean that our sins will be washed away by merely trusting Him without any striving. Only he who struggles hard against the allurements of sense-objects, and turns in tears and grief to the Lord, will be comforted."

Again, Chapters Eleven and Twelve: "What can more forcefully turn one to God than this panoramic vision of His multitudinous manifestations, and having thus prepared us for *bhakti*, the Lord gives us the essence of *bhakti* in the twelfth chapter which is so brief that anyone can commit it to memory to call it to his aid in moments of trial."

#### Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen :

"Chapter fourteen and the threefold division of the qualities of nature remind me of Henry Drummond's book I read about 30 years ago—*The Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. The laws are numerous but they have been broadly classified under three heads. The fourteenth chapter describes the laws to which man is subject and the fifteenth describes *Purushottama* the 'Perfect Man.' 'The ascent of man' is what we have to learn from these chapters. There is no man who is governed exclusively by one of the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas*. We have each of us to rise to a state in which we are governed predominantly by the *sattva* principle, until at last we rise beyond the three and are 'Perfect Men.' I can think of an illustration from the physical world. Take water, which in its solid state remains on the earth; it cannot ascend until it is rarefied into steam. But once it is rarefied into steam it rises up in the sky where at last it is transformed into clouds which drop down in the form of rain and fructify and bless the earth. We are all like water, we have to strive so to rarefy ourselves that all the ego in us perishes and we merge in the infinite to the eternal good of all."



One of the candidates for the *khadi* service went in one day with his own ailment. He said he was very much prone to anger and he wanted to cleanse himself with fasting. "I warn you," said Gandhiji, "that fasting is not always a penance for sins. Humble surrender to God is the only escape from sin, and all fasting except when it is undertaken to help that surrender is useless. I would suggest a better remedy. Go and apologise to the man you were angry with, ask him to prescribe the penance for you and do that. That will be much better expiation than fasting." The friend went and did likewise. But what should the man who has been wronged do in the case? Simply forgive? Forgiveness, we have been told, is the ornament of the brave, but what is that forgiveness? Passivity? Taking the blow lying down? Is that the meaning of resisting not evil.

This was the subject of a talk one evening and I summarise it briefly: "This talk of passive non-resistance has been the bane of our national life. Forgiveness is a quality of the soul, and therefore a positive quality. It is not negative. 'Conquer anger,' says Lord Buddha, 'by non-anger'. But what is that 'non-anger'? It is a positive quality and means the supreme virtue of charity or love. You must be used to this supreme virtue which must express itself in your going to the angry man, ascertaining from him the cause of his anger, making amends if you have given any cause for offence and then bringing home to him the error of his way and convincing him that it is wrong to be provoked. This consciousness of the quality of the soul, and deliberate exercise of it, elevate not only the man but the surrounding atmosphere. Of course only he who has that love will exercise it. This love can certainly be cultivated by incessant striving." M. D.

*Young India* : January 12, 1928.

## CHAPTER II

### Acquaintance with Religions

**T**OWARDS the end of my second year in England I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation— *The Song Celestial*—and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine Poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them that I had not read the *Gita* but that I would gladly read it with them, and that, though my knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning. I began reading the *Gita* with them. The verses in the second chapter

*If one  
Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs  
Attraction ; from attraction grows desire,  
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds  
Recklessness ; then the memory—all betrayed—  
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,  
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone.*

made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears. The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it to-day as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom. I have read almost all the English translations of it, and I regard Sir Edwin Arnold's as the best. He has been faithful to the text and yet it does not read like

a translation. Though I read the *Gita* with these friends, I cannot pretend to have studied it then. It was only after some years that it became for me a book of daily reading.

The brothers also recommended *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold, whom I knew till then as the author only of *The Song Celestial*, and I read it with even greater interest than I did the *Bhagwad Gita*. Once I had begun it I could not leave off. They also took me on one occasion to the Blavatsky Lodge and introduced me to Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant. The latter had just then joined the Theosophical Society, and I was following with great interest the controversy about her conversion. The friends advised me to join the Society, but I politely declined saying: "With my meagre knowledge of my own religion, I do not want to belong to any religious body." I recall having read, at the brothers' instance, Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. This book stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.

About the same time I met a good Christian from Manchester in a vegetarian boarding-house. He talked to me about Christianity. I narrated to him my Rajkot recollections. He was pained to hear them. He said :

I am a vegetarian. I do not drink. Many Christians are meat-eaters and drink, no doubt ; but neither meat eating nor drinking is enjoined by Scripture. Do please read the *Bible*.

I accepted his advice and he got me a copy. I have a faint recollection that he himself used to sell copies of the *Bible*, and I purchased from him an edition containing maps, concordance, and other aids. I began reading it, but I could not possibly read through the *Old Testament*. I read the book of *Genesis*, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the book of *Numbers*.

But the *New Testament* produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita*. The verses, *But I say unto you that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too*, delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's : *For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal*, etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, *The Light of Asia* and the Sermon on the Mount. That renunciation was the highest form of religion and appealed to me greatly.

This reading whetted my appetite for studying the lives of other religious teachers. A friend recommended Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-worship*. I read the chapter on the Hero as a Prophet and learnt of the Prophet's greatness and bravery and austere living.

Beyond this acquaintance with religion I could not go at the moment, as reading for the examination left me scarcely any time for outside subjects. But I took mental note of the fact that I should read more religious books and acquaint myself with all the principal religions.

And how could I help knowing something of atheism too ? Every Indian knew Bradlaugh's name and his so-called atheism. I read some book about it, the name of which I forget. It had no effect on me, for I had already crossed the Sahara of atheism. Mrs. Besant who was then very much in the limelight had turned to theism from atheism and that fact also strengthened my aversion to atheism. I had read her book *How I Became a Theosophist*.

It was about this time that Bradlaugh died. He was buried in the Woking Cemetery. I attended the funeral, as I believe every Indian residing in London did. A few clergymen also were present to do him the last honours. On our way back from the funeral we had to wait at the station for our train. A champion atheist from the crowd heckled one of these clergymen, " Well, sir, you believe in the existence of God ? "

" I do," said the good man in a low tone.

“ You also agree that the circumference of the Earth is 28,000 miles, don't you ? ” said the atheist with a smile of self-assurance.

“ Indeed.”

“ Pray, tell me then the size of your God and where He may be.”

“ Well, if we but knew, He resides in the hearts of us both.”

“ Now, now, don't take me to be a child,” said the champion with a triumphant look at us.

The clergyman assumed a humble silence.

This talk still further increased my prejudice against atheism.

*The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Part I, Chapter XX.*

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The *Gita* is, in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the *Gita* is in my opinion, unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal: The language is incredibly simple. But I nevertheless think that there should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translation should be so prepared as to avoid technicalities and in a manner that would make the teaching of the *Gita* intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit. But for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the teaching of the *Bhagwad Gita* because they do not know Sanskrit.

*Young India* : August 25, 1927.

## To The Students

**B**EING asked during his recent visit to Benares, by Acharya Anandshanker Dhruva to address a few words to students of the Kashi Vishva-Vidyalaya on the *Gita*, Gandhiji in the course of a Hindi speech said :—

“ I have been asked by Acharya Anandshanker Dhruva to say a few words on the *Gita* to the students of the Kashi Vishva-Vidyalaya. It is not without hesitation that I have accepted the invitation. What right can a layman like myself have to discourse on a theme like this in the presence of a savant like him ? I have neither his profound scholarship nor the deep study of our ancient religious lore which Pandit Malaviyaji, for instance, has. Sardar Vallabhbhai, in his characteristic manner, asked me this morning whether scavengers, cultivators and weavers like him and me were not altogether out of court in a city of *pandits* like Kashi and in the presence of such learned *pandits* like Malaviyaji and Acharya Dhruva ; and in a way he was right. But I have come here, not with any pretence to learning but only to tell you what reaction the *Gita* had on lay natures like mine and Sardar's. I wonder whether you have even a distant idea of how profoundly it affected the Sardar during his imprisonment. I am here to bear witness to the fact that in the Yervada Prison it gave him more strength and sustenance than meat the drink. To read the *Gita* in the original, he set about learning Sanskrit with the help of Pandit Satavalekar's *Sanskrit Self-instructor*, and once he had started on it, the book seldom left his hands. It occupied him from morning till night. It was not an obsession of an unoccupied mind, as you might be tempted to think, but the result of deep thought. ‘ Which is the one book that can be to the Hindus what the *Bible* is to the Christians or the *Koran* to the Mussalmans ? ’—we asked ourselves. Is it the *Vedas* ? No. The *Bhagvat* ? No. *Devipurān* ? No. Early in my childhood I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as an unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. The *Vedas* could not supply that need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the *Gita*, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the *Shastras* and the *Upanishadas*. That decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the *Gita*. To-day the *Gita* is not only my *Bible* or my *Koran* ; it is mor

than that—it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave birth long ago ; but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress I seek refuge in her bosom. Often in the course of my struggle against untouchability, I am confronted with conflicting opinions delivered by doctors of learning, some of whom tell me that untouchability as it is practised to-day has no sanction in Hinduism and they bless my efforts to eradicate it, but there are some others who maintain that untouchability has been an essential part of Hinduism from the very beginning. Which authority should I follow under the circumstances? I feel absolutely at sea. The *Vedas* and the *Smritis* are of no avail to me. I then approach the Mother and say : ‘ Mother, these learned *pandits* have put me in a predicament. Help me out of my perplexity.’ And the Mother, with a smile, says in reply : *The assurance held out by me in the ninth chapter is not meant for the Brahmins only, but for the sinner, and the outcaste, the down-trodden and the disinherited, too.* But in order to be worthy of that promise, we must be obedient and devoted children of the Mother and not disobedient and disloyal children, who only make a pretence of devotion.

“ It is sometimes alleged against the *Gita* that it is too difficult a work for the man in street. The criticism, I venture to submit, is ill-founded. The *Gita* enabled the late Lokamaniya, out of his encyclopædic learning and study, to produce a monumental commentary. For him it was storehouse of profound truths to exercise his intellect upon. But that need not scare away a lay reader. If you find all the eighteen chapters too difficult to negotiate, make a careful study of the first three chapters only. They will give you in a nutshell what is propounded in greater detail and from different angles in the remaining fifteen chapters. Even these three chapters can be further epitomised in a few verses that can be selected from these chapters. And to this the fact that at three distinct places the *Gita* goes even further and exhorts us to leave alone all ‘isms’ and take refuge in the Lord alone, and it will be seen how baseless is the charge that the message of the *Gita* is too subtle or complicated for lay minds to understand. The *Gita* is the Universal Mother. She turns away nobody. Her door

is wide open to anyone who knocks at it. A true votary of the *Gita* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed.

"Our students are prone to be upset by trifles. A trivial thing like failure in an examination plunges them into the darkest despair. The *Gita* inculcates upon them the duty of perseverance in the face of seeming failure. It teaches us that we have a right to actions only but not to the fruit thereof and that success and failure are one and the same thing at bottom. It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves, body, mind and soul, to pure duty, and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of all chance desires and undisciplined impulses. As a *satyagrahi*, I can declare that the *Gita* is ever presenting me with fresh lessons. If somebody tells me that this is my delusion, my reply to him would be that I shall hug this delusion as my richest treasure.

"I would advise students to begin their day with an early morning recitation of the *Gita*. I am a lover and devotee of Tulsidas. I adore the great spirit that gave to an aching world the all-healing *mantara* of *Ramanama*. But, I am here to-day not to present Tulsidas to you, but to ask you take up the study of the *Gita*, not in a carping or critical spirit, but in a devout and reverent spirit. Thus approached, she will grant your every wish. It is no joke, I admit, remembering by heart all the eighteen chapters, but it is worth while to make the attempt. Once you have tasted of its sweet nectar, your attachment to it will grow from day to day. The recitation of the *Gita* verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress and even in the darkness of solitary confinement. And, if with these verses on your lips you receive the final summons and deliver up your spirit, you will attain *Brahama Nirvana*—the Final Liberation. What that blessed state is, I leave it for your learned *Acharya* to explain." M. D.

*Harijan* : August 24, 1934.



## Nothing Without Grace

**B**Y the grace of medical friends and self-constituted gaolers, Sardar Vallabhbhai and Jamnalalji, I am now able by way of trial to resume to a limited extent my talks with the readers of *Harijan*. The restrictions that they have put on my liberty and to which I have agreed are that for the time being at any rate, I shall not write for *Harijan* more than I may consider to be absolutely necessary and that too not involving more than a few hours' writing per week. I shall not carry on private correspondence with reference to correspondents' personal problems or domestic difficulties, except those with which I have already concerned myself, and I shall not accept public engagements or attend or speak at public gatherings. There are positive directions about sleep, recreation, exercise and food, with which the reader is not concerned and with which therefore I need not deal. I hope that the readers of *Harijan* and correspondents will co-operate with me and Mahadev Desai, who has in the first instance to attend to all correspondence, in the observance of these restrictions.

It will interest the reader to know something about the origin of the breakdown and the measures taken to cope with it. So far as I have understood the medical friends, after a very careful and painstaking examination of my system they have found no functional derangement. Their opinion is that the breakdown was most probably due to deficiency of proteins and carbohydrates in the form of sugar and starches, coupled with overstrain for a prolonged period involving long hours and concentration on numerous taxing private problems in addition to the performance of daily public duty. So far as I can recollect I had been complaining for the past twelve months or more that if I did not curtail the volume of ever-growing

work I was sure to break down. Therefore, when it came, it was nothing new to me. And it is highly likely that the world would have heard little of it but for the over-anxiety of one of the friends who, on seeing me indisposed, sent a sensational note to Jamnalalji who gathered together all the medical talent that was available in Wardha and sent messages to Nagpur and Bombay for further help.

The day I collapsed I had a warning on rising in the morning that there was some unusual pain about the neck, but I made light of it and never mentioned it to anybody. I continued to go through the daily programme. The final stroke was a most exhausting and serious conversation I had with a friend whilst I was having the daily evening stroll. The nerves had already been sufficiently taxed during the preceding fortnight with the consideration and solution of problems which for me were quite as big and as important as, say, the paramount question of *Swaraj*.

Even if no fuss had been made over the collapse, I would have taken nature's peremptory warning to heart, given myself moderate rest and tided over the difficulty. But looking back upon the past I feel that it was well that the fuss was made. The extraordinary precautions advised by the medical friends and equally extraordinary care taken by the two gaolers enforced on me the exacting rest which I would not have taken and which allowed ample time for introspection. Not only have I profited by it but the introspection has revealed vital defects in my following of the interpretation of the *Gita* as I have understood it. I have discovered that I have not approached with adequate detachment the innumerable problems that have presented themselves for solution. It is clear that I have taken many of them to heart and allowed them to rouse my emotional being and thus affect my nerves. In other words, they have not, as they should have in a votary of the *Gita*, left my body or mind untouched. I verily believe that one who literally follows the prescription of the Eternal Mother need never grow old in mind. Such a one's body will wither in due course like leaves of a healthy tree, leaving the mind as young and as fresh as ever. That seems to me to be the meaning of Bhishma delivering his marvellous discourse to Youdhishthira though he was on his

death-bed. Medical friends were never tired of warning me against being excited over or affected by events happening around me. Extra precautions were taken to keep from me news of tragic character. Though I think I was not quite so bad a devotee of the *Gita* as their precautions lead me to suppose, there was undoubtedly substance behind them. For I discovered with what a wrench I accepted Jamnalalji's conditions and demand that I should remove from Maganwadi to Mahila *Ashram*. Anyway I had lost credit with him for detached action. The fact of the collapse was for him eloquent enough testimony for discrediting my vaunted detachment. I must plead guilty to the condemnation.

The worst, however, was to follow. I have been trying to follow *brahmacharya* consciously and deliberately since 1899. My definition of it is purity not merely of body but of both speech and thought also. With the exception of what must be regarded as one lapse, I can recall no instance, during more than thirty-six years' constant and conscious effort, of mental disturbance such as I experienced during this illness. I was disgusted with myself. The moment the feeling came I acquainted my attendants and the medical friends with my condition. They could give me no help. I expected none. I broke loose after the experience from the rigid rest that was imposed upon me. The confession of the wretched experience brought much relief to me. I felt as if a great load had been raised from over me. It enabled me to pull myself together before any harm could be done. But what of the *Gita*? Its teaching is clear and precise. A mind that is once hooked to the Star of Stars becomes incorruptible. How far I must be from Him, He alone knows. Thank God my much-vaunted *mahatma*ship has never fooled me. But this enforced test has humbled me as never before. It has brought to the surface my limitations and imperfections. But I am not so much ashamed of them as I should be of hiding them from the public. My faith in the message of the *Gita* is as bright as ever. Unwearied, ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning that faith into rich infallible experience. But the same *Gita* says without any equivocation that the experience is not to be had without divine grace. We should develop swelled heads if Divinity had not made that ample reservation.

*Harijan* : February 29, 1936.

## Gita in National Schools

**A** CORRESPONDENT asks whether *Gita* may be compulsorily taught in national schools to all boys whether Hindus or non-Hindus. When I was travelling in Mysore two years ago, I had occasion to express my sorrow that the Hindu boys of a high school did not know the *Gita*. I am thus partial to the teaching of *Gita* not only in national schools but in every educational institution. It should be considered a shame for a Hindu boy or girl not to know the *Gita*. But my insistence stops short at compulsion especially so for national schools. Whilst it is true that *Gita* is a book of universal religion, it is a claim which cannot be forced upon anyone. A Christian or a Mussalman or a Parsi may reject the claim or may advance the same claim for the *Bible*, the *Koran* or the *Avesta*, as the case may be. I fear that *Gita* teaching cannot be made compulsory even regarding all those who may choose to be classed as Hindus. Many Sikhs and Jains regard themselves as Hindus but may object to compulsory *Gita* teaching for their boys and girls. The case will be different for sectional schools. I should hold it quite appropriate for a *Vaishnav* school for instance to lay down *Gita* as part of religious instruction. Every private school has the right to prescribe its own course of instruction. But a national school has to act within well-defined limits. There is no compulsion where there is no interference with a right. No one can claim the right to enter a private school, every member of a nation has the right presumptively to enter a national school. Hence what would be regarded in the one case as a condition of entrance would in the other be regarded as compulsion. The *Gita* will never be universal by compulsion from without. It will be so if its admirers will not seek to force it down the throats of others and if they will illustrate its teachings in their own lives.

*Young India* : June 20, 1929.

## Distortion of Truth

**A** CORRESPONDENT has been endeavouring with the help of the Head Master of a High School to introduce the teaching of the Gita among its boys. But at a recent meeting convened to organise Gita readings, a Bank Manager got up and disturbed the even tenor of the proceedings by saying that students had not the adhikara qualifications for studying the Gita : it was not a plaything to be placed before students. The correspondent sends me a long and argued letter about the incident and sends in support of his contention some apt sayings from Ramakrishna Paramahansa from which I cull the following :

- “ Boys and youths should be encouraged to seek God. They are like unpacked fruits being totally untainted by worldly desires. Once such desires have entered their minds, it is very difficult to make them tread the path to salvation.
- “ Why do I love young men so much ? Because they are masters of the whole (16 annas) of their minds, which get divided and sub-divided as they grow up. One-half of the mind of a married man goes to his wife. When a child is born it takes away one-fourth (4 annas) and the remaining one-fourth (4 annas) is scattered over parents, worldly honours, dress, etc. Therefore a young mind can easily know God. It is very difficult for old people to do so.
- “ The parrot cannot be taught to sing if the membrane of its throat becomes hardened with age. It must be taught while it is young. Similarly, in old age it is difficult for mind to be fixed on God. It can be easily done so in youth.
- “ If a *seer* of adulterated milk contains a *chhatank* (sixteenth part of a *seer*) of water, it can be thickened into *kahira* (condensed milk) with very little labour and consumption of fuel. But should there be three *paos* ( $\frac{3}{4}$  *seer*) of water in a *seer* the milk will not be easily thickened and a large consumption of fuel will be required. A young mind, being but slightly adulterated with worldly desires, can be easily turned towards God ; this cannot be done with the minds of old people which are highly adulterated with such desires.

## GITA THE MOTHER

“The tender bamboo can be easily bent, but the full-grown bamboo breaks when an attempt is made to bend it. It is easy to bend young hearts towards God, but the heart of the old escapes the hold when so drawn.

“The human mind is like a package of mustard seed. As it is very difficult to gather the seeds that escape out of a torn package and are scattered in all directions so when the human mind runs in diverse directions and is occupied with many worldly things, it is not a very easy task to collect and concentrate it. The mind of a youth, not running in diverse directions, can be easily fixed on anything; but the mind of an old man being totally occupied with worldly things, it is very hard for him to draw it away from them and fix it on God.”

I had heard of *adhyakara* in connection with the *Vedas*, but I never knew that the *Gita* required the qualifications that the Bank Manager had in mind. It would have been better if he had stated the nature of the qualifications he required. The *Gita* clearly states that it is meant for all but scoffers. If Hindu students may not read the *Gita* they may not read any religious works at all. Indeed the original conception in Hinduism is that the student life is the life of a *brahmachari* who should begin it with a knowledge of religion coupled with practice so that he may digest what he learns and weave religious conduct into his life. The student of old began to live his religion before he knew what it was, and this conduct was followed by due enlightenment, so that he might know the reason for the conduct prescribed for him.

*Adhyakara* then there certainly was. But it was the *adhyakara* of right conduct known as the five *yamas* or cardinal restraints: *ahimsa* (innocence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). These were the rules that had to be observed by anybody who wished to study religion. He may not go to religious books for proving the necessity of these fundamentals of religion.

But to-day the word *adhyakara* like many such potent words has suffered distortion, and a dissolute man, simply because he is called *brahman* has *adhyakara* to read and expound *Shastras* to us, whereas a man, if he is labelled an untouchable because of his birth in a particular state, no matter how virtuous he may be, may not read them.

But the author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is a part, wrote his great work for the purpose of meeting this insane objection, and made it accessible to all irrespective of the so-called caste, provided I presume that he complied with the observances I have described. I add the qualifying expression 'I presume' for at the time of writing I do not recall the observance of the *yamas* as a condition precedent to person studying the *Mahabharata*. Experience, however, shows that the purity of heart and the devotional frame of mind are necessary for proper understanding of religious books.

The printing age has broken down all barriers, and scoffers read religious books with the same freedom (if not greater) that the religiously-minded have. But we are here discussing propriety of students reading the *Gita* as part of religious instruction and devotional exercise. Here I cannot imagine any class of persons more amenable to the restraints and thus more fitted than students for such instruction. Unfortunately it is to be admitted that neither the students nor the instructors in the majority of cases think anything of the real *adhikara* of the five restraints.

*Young India* : December 8, 1927.

## Gita Jayanti

*Thus writes Shri G. V. Ketkar of Kcsari, Poona :*

“ This year ‘*Gita Jayanti*’ is on 22nd December, Friday, I repeat the request which I have been making for some years, that you should write about the *Gita* and *Gita Jayanti* in *Harijan*. I also repeat another which was made last year. In one of your speeches on the *Gita* you have said for those who have no time to go through the whole of the *Gita* (700 verses) it is sufficient to read the second and third chapters. You have also said that these two chapters can be further epitomised. If possible, you should explain why you regard second and third chapters as fundamental. I have tried to place the same idea before the public by publishing the verses of the second and third chapters as *Gita Bija* or the essence of the *Gita*. Your writing on the subject will naturally be more effective.”

I have hitherto resisted Shri Ketkar's request. I do not know that these *Jayanti's* serve the purpose for which they are intended. Spiritual matters do not admit of the ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and secondly because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That to my mind is the secret of the hold of the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and such other works on the millions. In yielding to Shri Ketkar's pressure, therefore, I entertain the hope that those who take part in the forthcoming celebration will approach it in the proper spirit and with a fixed intention to live up to the message of the noble song. I have endeavoured to show that its message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment. The theme of the *Gita* is contained in the second chapter, and the way to carry out the



message is to be found in the third chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The *Gita* has been called "Gitai" by Vinoba who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is *the* real mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties.

I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in my distress. It is, moreover, a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard *Gita* as an abstruse book. No doubt learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But in my opinion a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the *Gita*. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical translation which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial*.

*Harijan* : December 16, 1939.

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## Tulsidas

SEVERAL friends on various occasions have addressed to me criticisms regarding my attitude towards *Tulsi Ramayana*. The substance of their criticisms is as follows :—

“ You have described the *Ramayana* as the best of books, but we have never been able to reconcile ourselves with your view. Do not you see how *Tulsidas* has disparaged womankind, defended Rama's unchivalrous ambush on Vali, praised Vibhishan for betrayal of his country, and described Rama as an *avatar* in spite of his gross injustice to Sita ? What beauty do you find in a book like this ? Or do you think that the poetic beauty of the book compensates for everything else ? If it is so, then we venture to suggest that you have no qualifications for the task.”

I admit that if we take the criticisms of every point individually, they will be found difficult to refute and the whole of the *Ramayana* can, in this manner, be easily condemned. But that can be said of almost everything and everybody. There is a story related about a celebrated artist that in order to answer his critics he put his picture in a show window and invited visitors to indicate their opinion by marking the spot they did not like. The result was that there was hardly any portion that was not covered by the critics' marks. As a matter of fact, however, the picture was a masterpiece of art. Indeed even the *Vedas*, the *Bible* and the *Koran* have not been exempt from condemnation. But their lovers fail to discover those faults in them. In order to arrive at a proper estimate of a book it must be judged as a whole. So much for external criticism. The internal test of a book consists in finding out what effect it has produced on the majority of its readers. Judged by either method the position of the *Ramayana* as a book *par excellence* remains unassailable. This, however, does not mean that it is absolutely faultless. But it is claimed on behalf of the *Ramayana* that it has given peace to millions, has given faith to those who had it not,

and is even to-day serving a healing balm to thousands who are burnt by the fire of unbelief. Every page of it is overflowing with devotion. It is a veritable mine of spiritual experience.

It is true that the *Ramayana* is sometimes used by evil-minded persons to support their evil practices. But that is no proof of evil in the *Ramayana*. I admit that Tulsidas has, unintentionally as I think, done injustice to womankind. In this, as in several other respects also, he has failed to rise above the prevailing notions of his age. In other words, Tulsidas was not a reformer; he was only a prince among devotees. The faults of the *Ramayana* are less a reflection on Tulsidas than a reflection on the age in which he lived.

What should be the attitude of the reformer regarding the position of women or towards Tulsidas under such circumstances? Can he derive no help whatever from Tulsidas? The reply is emphatically 'he can.' In spite of disparaging remarks about women in the *Ramayana*, it should not be forgotten that in it Tulsidas has presented to the world his matchless picture of Sita. Where would be Rama without Sita? We find a host of other ennobling figures like Kaushalya, Sumitra, etc., in the *Ramayana*. We bow our heads in reverence before the faith and devotion of Shabari and Ahlaya. Ravana was a monster but Manododari was a *sati*. In my opinion these instances go to prove that Tulsidasji was no reviler of women by conviction. On the contrary, so far as his convictions went, he had only reverence for them. So much for Tulsidasji's attitude towards women.

In the matter of the killing of Vali, however, there is room for two opinions. In Vibhishan I can find no fault. Vibhishan offered *satyagraha* against his brother. His example teaches us that it is a travesty of patriotism to sympathise with or try to conceal the faults of one's rulers or country, and to oppose them is the truest service to his country. The treatment of Sita by Rama does not denote heartlessness. It is a proof of a duel between kindly duty and a husband's love for his wife.

To the sceptics who feel honest doubts in connection with the *Ramayana*, I would suggest that they should not accept any-

body's interpretations mechanically. They should leave out such portions about which they feel doubtful. Nothing contrary to truth and *ahimsa* need be condoned. It would be sheer perversity to argue that because in our opinion Rama practised deception, we too may do likewise. The proper thing to do would be to believe that Rama was incapable of practising deception. As the *Gita* says : *There is nothing in the world that is entirely free from fault.* Let us therefore like the fabled swan, who rejects the water and takes only the cream, learns to treasure only the good and reject the evil in everything. Nothing and no one is perfect but God.

(Translated from Hindi *Navajivan* by P.)

*Young India* : October 31, 1929.

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My *Gita* tells me that evil can never result from a good action.

*Young India* : June 29, 1925.

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When I hear *Gita* verses melodiously recited, I never grow weary of hearing and the more I hear the deeper sinks the meaning into my heart. Melodious recitations of the *Ramayana* which I heard in my childhood left on me an impression which years have not obliterated or weakened.

*Young India* : 10, 1929.

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Let the *Gita* be to you a mine of diamonds, as it has been to me, let it be your constant guide and friend on life's way. Let it light your path and dignify your labour.

*Young India* : February 2, 1928

## CHAPTER III

### The New Testament

ONE of the missionary friends wanted to know now the *Gita* and the *New Testament* compared as sources of comfort so far as Gandhiji was concerned, and instead of giving a bald answer that he derived all the comfort that he needed from the *Bhagwad Gita*, he retold the story of the beginnings of his religious studies in England, with which the readers of the *Autobiography* are in the main familiar. All missionaries seem to forget that the men they approach with their gospel have their traditions and their own religions which sustain them from generation to generation. Gandhiji told these friends that when he read the Sermon on the Mount he read nothing new, but found in it, vividly told, what he had learnt in his childhood. *There is nothing much in giving a cup of water to one who gave you a cup of water, or saluting one who salutes you but, there is some virtue in doing a good turn to one who has done you a bad turn.* "I have not been able to see," he said, "any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the *Bhagwad Gita*. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, the *Bhagwad Gita* reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the law of love—the law of abandon as I would call it—in a scientific manner. The Sermon on the Mount gives the same law in a wonderful language. The *New Testament* gave me comfort and boundless joy, as it came after the repulsion that parts of the *Old* had given me. To-day supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*."

And, as though summing up the argument with a great warning, he said; *You know there is one thing in me, and that is that I love to see the bright side of things and not the seamy side,* and so I can derive comfort and inspiration from any great book of any great religion. I may not be able to reproduce a single verse from the *Gita* or the *New Testament*, a Hindu child or Christian child may be able to repeat the verses better, but those clever children cannot deprive me of the assimilation that is in me to-day of the spirit of the two books." M.D.

*Young India* : December 22, 1927.

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I must tell you in all humility that Hinduism, as I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the *Bhagwad Gita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep impression upon me, but I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointment stares me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagwad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me ; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and, if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagwad Gita*.

(From an address to the Missionaries in Calcutta at Y.M.C.A.)

*Young India* : August 6, 1925

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I have endeavoured to study the *Bible*. I consider it as part of my scriptures. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount competes almost on equal terms with the *Bhagwad Gita* for the domination of my heart.

*Young India* : February 14, 1916.

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I believe in the *Bible* as I believe in the *Gita*. I regard all the great faiths of the world as equally true with my own. It hurts me to see anyone of them caricatured as they are to-day by their own followers.

*Harijan* : December 19, 1936.

## A Poser

*'A well-wisher' sends these lines for my meditation :*

"The *Bible* can be read in 566 languages. In how many can the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*?"

**I**T is usual for me to receive such posers. 'A well-wisher' deserves an answer. I have great regard for the missionaries for their zeal and self-sacrifice. But I have not hesitated to point out to them that both are often misplaced. What though the *Bible* were translated in every tongue in the world? Is a patent medicine better than the *Upanishads* for being advertised in more languages than the *Upanishads*? An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody will see it. The *Bible* was a greater power when the early fathers preached it than it is to-day. 'A well-wisher' has little conception of the way truth works, if he thinks that the translation of the *Bible* in more languages than the *Upanishads* is any test of its superiority. Truth has to be lived if it is to fructify. But if it is any satisfaction to 'A well-wisher' to have my answer I may gladly tell him that the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* have been translated into far fewer languages than the *Bible*. I have never been curious enough to know in how many languages they are translated.

*Young India* : February 26, 1925.

Mr. Matthews was curious to know if Gandhiji followed any spiritual practices and what special reading he had found helpful.

Gandhiji : I am a stranger to *yogic* practices. The practice I follow is a practice I learnt in my childhood from my nurse. I was afraid of ghosts. She used to say to me : *There are no*

ghosts, but if you are afraid, repeat *Ramaynama*. What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge thing in my mental firmament. It is a sun that has brightened my darkest hour. A Christian may find the same solace from the repetition of the name of Jesus, and a Muslim from the name of *Allah*. All these things have the same implications and they produce identical results under identical circumstances. Only the repetition must not be a lip expression, but part of your very being. About helpful readings we have regular readings of the *Bhagwad Gita* and we have now reached a stage when we finish the *Gita* every week by having readings of appointed chapters every morning. Then we have hymns from the various saints of India, and we therein include hymns from the Christian hymn-book. As Khan Sahab is with us, we have readings from the *Koran* also. We believe in the equality of all religions. I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I have also derived solace from the *New Testament* and the *Koran*. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the *Bhagwad Gita*, though everything in the former may not appeal to me—everything in the *Epistles of Paul*, for instance,—not everything in Tulsidas. The *Gita* is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore there is no question of selection.

Mr. Matthews : You are really a Protestant.

Gandhiji : I do not know what I am or am not. Mr. Hodge will call me a Presbyterian !

Mr. Matthews : Where do you find the seat of authority ?

Gandhiji : It lies here (pointing to his breast). I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Matthews may give one version of the text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all, "*the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.*" But you



must not misunderstand my position. I believe in Faith also, in things where reason has no place, *e.g.*, the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason '*yet we are seven.*' I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect, 'Yet there is God.' M. D.

*Harijan* : December 5, 1936.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Tolerance—Equality of Religions**

**I** DO not like the word ' tolerance ' but could not think of a better one. Tolerance may imply gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas *ahimsa* teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faith of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfections. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realised religion in its perfection, even as we have not realised God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and reinterpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate but would think it our duty to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of our faiths.

The question then arises : Why should there be so many different faiths ? The Soul is one but the bodies which She

animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies, yet we recognise the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose Interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the north pole from the south. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.

Tolerance obviously does not disturb the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil. The reference here throughout is naturally to the principal faiths of the world. They are all based on common fundamentals. They have all produced great saints.

*Teravada Mandir, Chapter X.*

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The acceptance of doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object that there would be no room left for equi-mindedness, if everyone took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion. If we follow the law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the

other party doet not observe the law of Love, he may be violent to us. If, however, we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be to suffer in our own person.

*Yeravda Mandir, Chapter XI*

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## God is One

**W**HO can name Him, and knowing what he says,  
Say, "I believe in Him?" And who can feel,  
And, with self-violence, to conscious wrong,  
Hardening his heart, say, "I believe Him not?"  
The All-embracing, All-sustaining One,  
Say, does He not embrace, sustain, include  
Thee?—Me—Himself? Bends not the sky above?  
And earth, on which we are, is not firm?  
And over us, with constant kindly smile,  
The sleepless stars keep everlasting watch?  
Am I not here gazing into thine eyes?

And does not All, that is,  
—Seen and unseen—mysterious all—  
Around thee, and within,  
Untiring agency,  
Press on thy heart and mind?

—Fill thy whole heart with it—and, when thou art  
Lost in the consciousness of happiness,  
Then call it what thou wilt

Happiness?—Heart?—Love?—God?  
I have no name for it!  
Feeling is all in all!  
Name is but sound and rack  
A mist around the glow of Heaven.

—Goethe's *Faust*.

Last Thursday night, some Mussalman friends called on me by appointment. They appeared to me to be earnest and sincere. They had much to say against *Shuddhi* and *Sangathan*.

I have said my say about these movements already. So far as possible I do not wish during the privileged weeks to say anything on matters of controversy. I wish to engage the attention of the reader on the solution they offered. They said, "We believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*. We believe in Shri Krishnaji Maharaj and Ramchanderji Maharaj (the adjectives are theirs). Why cannot Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Koran* and say with us that there is no God but God and Mohammed is His Prophet? Ours is not an exclusive religion, but it is essentially inclusive."

I told them that the solution was not quite so simple as they put it. The formula they suggested might be good enough for the cultured few, but it would prove ineffective for the man in the street. For the Hindus cow-protection and the playing of music even near the mosque was the substance of Hinduism, and for the Mussalmans cow-killing and prohibition of music was the substance of Islam. It was, therefore, necessary that the Hindus abandon the idea of compelling Mussalmans to stop cow-killing, and Mussalmans the idea of compelling the Hindus to stop music. The regulation of cow-slaughter and playing of music must be left to the goodwill of the respective communities. Each practice would assume becoming proportion with the growth of the tolerant spirit. But I do not propose to elaborate here this ticklish question.

I wish to examine the attractive formula presented by the Mussalman friends and state what is at least acceptable to me; and as my instinct is wholly Hindu, I know that what I am about to say will be acceptable to the vast mass of Hindus.

In fact it is the average Mussalman who will not accept the divinity of the *Vedas* and the other Hindu scriptures, or Krishna or Rama as Prophets or incarnations of the Deity. With the Hindu it is a new-fangled notion to revile the *Koran* and the Prophet. I have known the Prophet spoken of with reverence in Hindu circles. There are even Hindu songs paying tribute to Islam.

Take the first half of the formula: God is certainly One. He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknown and unknown to the vast majority of mankind. He is everywhere.

He sees without eyes, and hears without ears. He is formless and indivisible. He is uncreated, has no father, mother or child and yet He allows himself to be worshipped as father, mother, wife and child. He allows Himself even to be worshipped as stock and stone, although He is none of these things. He is the most elusive. He is the nearest to us if we would but know the fact. But He is farthest from us when we do not want to realise His omnipresence. There are many gods in the *Veda*. Other scriptures call them angels. But the Vedas sing of only one God.

I have no hesitation in regarding the *Koran* as revealed, as I have none in regarding the *Bible*, the *Zend-Avesta*, the *Granth Saheb* and any other clean scriptures as revealed. Revelation is the exclusive property of no nation, no tribe. If I know Hinduism at all, it is essentially inclusive and ever-growing, ever-responsive. It gives the freest scope to imagination, speculation and reason. I have found not the slightest difficulty in Hindu circles about evoking reverence for the *Koran* and the Prophet. But I have found difficulty in Mussalman circles about evoking the same reverence for the *Vedas* or the incarnations. I had a very good Mussalman client in South Africa. He is, alas, dead now. The relation of client and counsel developed into one of close companionship and mutual regard. We often had religious discussions. My friend, though not learned in any sense of the term, had an intellect as sharp as a razor. He knew everything of the *Koran*. He knew something of other religions also. He was interested in my accepting Islam. I said to him. "I can pay full respect to the *Koran* and the Prophet, why do you ask me to reject the *Vedas* and the incarnations? They have helped me to be what I am. I find the greatest consolation from the *Bhagavad Gita* and Tulsidas' *Ramayana*. I frankly confess that the *Koran*, the *Bible* and the other scriptures of the world, in spite of my great regard for them, do not move me as do the *Gita* of Krishna and the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas." The friend despaired of me and had no hesitation in saying that there must be something wrong with me. His, however, is not an exceptional case, because I have since met many Mussalman friends who have held the same view. I do, how-

ever, believe that this is a passing phase. I share justice Amceer Ali's view that Islam in the days of Harun-al-Rashid and Mamun was the most tolerant amongst the world's religions. But there was a reaction against the liberalism of the teachers of their times. The reactionaries had many learned, able and influential men amongst them and they very nearly overwhelmed the liberal and tolerant teachers and philosophers of Islam. We in India are still suffering from the effect of the reaction. But I have not a shadow of doubt that Islam has sufficient in itself to become purged of illiberalism and intolerance. We are fast reaching the time when the acceptance of the formula suggested by the friends will be a common thing among mankind. The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts. For Hindus to expect Islam, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism to be driven out of India is as idle a dream as it would be for Mussalmans to have only the Islam of their imagination to rule the world. But if belief in One God and the race of his Prophet in a never-ending chain is sufficient for Islam, then we are all Mussalmans, but we are also all Hindus and Christians. Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture.

*Young India* : September 25, 1925

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## Personality of Jesus

Q. I should be obliged to hear from you your attitude to the personality of Jesus.

A. I have often made it clear. I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God. That epithet in its material interpretation is quite unacceptable. Metaphorically we are all begotten sons of God, but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense. Thus for me Chaitanya may be the only begotten son of God.

Q. But don't you believe in the *perfection* of human nature, and don't you believe that Jesus had attained perfection.

A. I believe in the *perfectibility* of human nature. Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. To say that he was perfect is to deny God's superiority to man. And then in this matter I have a theory of my own. Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh, we can attain perfection only after dissolution of the body. Therefore, God alone is absolutely perfect. When He descends to earth, He of His own accord limits Himself. Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh. I do not need either the prophecies or the miracles to establish Jesus' greatness as a teacher. Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry. There is no miracle in the story of the multitude being fed on a handful of loaves. A magician can create that illusion. But woe work the day on which a magician would be hailed as the Saviour of Humanity! As for Jesus raising the dead to life, well I doubt if the men he raised were really dead. I raised a *relative's* child from supposed death to life, but that was because the child was not dead, and but for my presence there she might have been cremated. But I saw that life was not extinct. I gave her an enema and she was restored to life. There was no

miracle about it. I do not deny that Jesus had certain psychic powers and he was undoubtedly filled with the love of humanity. But he brought to life not people who were dead but who were believed to be dead. The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we limited beings fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God. We may copy God, but not He us. We may not divide Time for Him. Time for Him is eternity. For us there is past, present and future. And what is human life of a hundred years but less than a mere speck in the eternity of time?

*Harijan* : April 17, 1937.

I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect other's religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. We need not dread, upon our grown-up children, the influence of scriptures other than our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by encouraging them to study freely all that is clean. Fear there would be when someone reads his own scriptures to young people with the intention secretly or openly of converting them. He must then be biased in favour of his own scriptures. For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the *Bible*, the *Koran*, and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch *sanatani* Hindu. He is no *sanatani* Hindu who is narrow, bigoted, and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a staunch *sanatani* Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

The charge of being a Christian in secret is not new. It is both a libel and a compliment—a libel because there are men

who can believe me to capable of being secretly anything, *i. e.*, the fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear, there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgment of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussalman, with my own interpretation of the *Bible* or the *Koran*, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Mussalman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians nor Mussalmans. They all are judged not according to their labels or professions but according to their actions irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence there will always be these labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.

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*Young India* : September 9, 1926

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.

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*Harijan* : February 10, 1934.

The *Allah* of Islam is the same as the God of Christians and the *Ishwara* of Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism, there are many names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes, and little man has tried in his humble way to describe mighty God by giving Him attributes, though He is above all attributes, Indescribable, Immeasurable. Living faith in this God means acceptance of the brotherhood of mankind. It also means equal respect for all religions. If Islam is dear to you, Hinduism is

dear to me and Christianity is dear to the Christians. It would be the height of intolerance—and intolerance is a species of violence—to believe that your religion is superior to other religions and that you would be justified in wanting others to change over to your faith.

*Harijan* : May 14, 1938.

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The *Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. *Verily, verily I say unto you, not everyone that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven shall enter the Kingdom*, was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.

*Harijan* : April 18, 1936

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Unless I accept the position that all religions are equal, and I have as much regard for other religions as I have for my own, I would not be able to live in the boiling war around me. Any make-believe combination of spiritual force is doomed to failure if this fundamental position is not accepted. I read and get all my inspiration from the *Gita*. But I also read the *Bible* and the *Koran* to enrich my own religion. I incorporate all that is good in other religions.

*Harijan* : January 16, 1937.

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True religion is not narrow dogma. It is not external observance. It is faith in God, and living in the presence of God ; it means faith in a future life, in truth and *ahimsa*.

*Young India* : August 30, 1928.

## Religion Defined

**Q.** What is the speciality of Hinduism for which a Hindu need cling to it ?

**A.** This is an invidious question. Perhaps it is also profitless. But I must answer it, if only to show what I mean by religion. The closest, though very incomplete, analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more so is the tie of religion. And just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex, but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly faithful to one's own religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own. To pursue the analogy still further, even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion presuppose blindness to the shortcomings of that religion. Indeed faithfulness, not blind adherence, demands a keener preception of shortcomings and therefore a livelier sense of the proper remedy for their removal. Taking the view I do of religion, it is unnecessary for me to examine the beauties of Hinduism. The reader may rest assured that I am not likely to remain Hindu, if I am not conscious of its many beauties. Only for my purpose they need not be exclusive. My approach to other religions, therefore, is never as a fault-finding critic but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in other religions and wishing to incorporate in my own the good I may find in them and miss in mine.

*Harijan* : August 12, 1933.

## Humanitarian Economics

**I** HAVE before me a press-cutting containing a long interrogatory addressed to me on the question of cow-protection. The underlying suggestion obviously seems to be that the methods of cow-protection advocated by me are not consistent with my profession of Hinduism. For in his introductory remarks to his questions the writer has tried to make light of the basic principle of cow-protection that I have formulated, *viz.*, that what is economically wrong cannot be religiously right. In other words, if a religion cuts at the very fundamentals of economics, it is not a true religion but only a delusion. My critic, on the other hand, believes that this view is opposed to the teachings of our ancient scriptures. I, at least, am not aware of a single text in opposition to this view nor do I know of any religious institution that is being maintained in any part of the world to-day in antagonism to the elementary principles of economics. As for nature, anyone, who has eyes can see that it always observes the principle that I have stated. For instance, if it has implanted in its creation the instinct for food, it also produces enough food to satisfy that instinct from day to day. But it does not produce a jot more. That is nature's way. But man, blinded by his selfish greed, grabs and consumes more than his requirements in defiance of nature's principle, in defiance of the elementary and immutable moralities of non-stealing and non-possession of other's property and thus brings down no end of misery upon himself and his fellow-creatures. To turn to another illustration, our *Shastras* have enjoined that the *Brahman* should give knowledge as charity without expecting any material reward for it for himself. But they have at the same time conferred upon him the privilege of asking for and receiving alms and have laid upon the other

sections of the community the duty of giving alms, thus uniting religion and economics in a common bond of harmony. The reader will be able to find further instances of this kind for himself. The religious principle requires that the debit and credit sides of one's balance-sheet should be perfectly square. That is also the truest economics and therefore true religion. Whenever there is any discrepancy between these two, it bad economics and makes for unrighteousness. That is why the illustrious author of the *Gita* has defined *yoga* as "balance" or "evenness". But the majority of mankind do not understand this use of economics to subserve religion; they want it only for amassing "profits" for themselves. Humanitarian economics, on the other hand, for which I stand, rules out "profits" altogether. But it rules out 'deficit' no less for the simple-reason that it is utterly impossible to safeguard a religious institution by following a policy of dead loss. That is the reason why in spite of our 1,500 *goshalas* we have not only failed to protect the cow but its slaughter is day by day on the increase. If in spite of this we delude ourselves into the belief that we have done our duty by the cow by establishing these homes for cattle, and remain snugly self-satisfied there, whatever comfort it may give us, it won't bring us one whit nearer the goal of cow-protection, whereas it can be demonstrably shown that by adopting the policy that I have suggested we can easily realise this goal. It does not require much effort to see that but for the fact that the cow yields us milk, the duty of cow-protection would not have come into being at all. There are a host of other innocent animals besides the cow in the world but nobody has ever thought of setting up their protection as a religious obligation, and if somebody had attempted it, it would have simply remained a dead-letter. We have use for the cow. That is why it has become religiously incumbent on us to protect it.

*Young India* : November 3, 1927.

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## CHAPTER V

### Hindu Students and the Gita

**Y**OU state in your address that you read the *Gospels* daily even as I do. I cannot say that I read the *Gospels* daily, but I can say that I have read the *Gospels* in a humble and prayerful spirit, and it is well with you if you are also reading the *Gospels* in that spirit. But I expect that the vast majority of you are Hindu boys. I wish that you could have said to me that at least your Hindu boys were reading the *Bhagavad Gita* daily to derive inspiration. For I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches, by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I therefore admit, in all humility that even the *Vedas*, the *Koran* and the *Bible* are the imperfect word of God, and imperfect beings that we are, swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fullness, and so I say to a Hindu boy, that he must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up, as I say to a Mussalman or a Christian boy that he must not uproot his traditions. And so whilst I would welcome your learning the *Gospels* and your learning the *Koran*, I would certainly insist on all of you, Hindu boys, if I had the power of insistence, learning the *Gita*. It is my belief that the impurity that we



see about boys in schools, the carelessness about things that matter in life, the levity with which the student world deals with the greatest and most fundamental questions of life is due to this uprooting of tradition from which boys have hitherto derived their sustenance.

"But I must not be misunderstood. I do not hold that everything ancient is good because it is ancient. I do not advocate surrender of God-given reasoning faculty in the face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient, inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered to be an ancient tradition, the institution of child widowhood and child marriage may be considered to be an ancient tradition, and even so many an ancient horrible belief and superstitious practice. I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power. When, therefore, I talk of respecting the ancient tradition, you now understand what I mean, and it is because I see the same God in the *Bhagavad Gita* as I see in the *Bible* and the *Koran* that I say to the Hindu boys that they will derive greater inspiration from the *Bhagavad Gita* because they will be tuned to the *Gita* more than to any other book."

(From an address to the Mannar gudi students).

*Young India* : September 22, 1927.

I am not a literalist. Therefore, I try to understand the *spirit* of the various scriptures of the world. I apply the test of Truth and *Ahimsa* laid down by these very scriptures for interpretation. I reject what is inconsistent with that test, and I appropriate all that is consistent with it. The story of a *Sudra* having been punished by Ramachandra for daring to learn the *Vedas*, I reject as an interpolation. And in any event, I worship Rama, the perfect being of my conception, not a historical person, facts about whose life may vary with the progress of new historical discoveries and researches. Tulsidas had nothing to do with the Rama of history. Judged by historical test, his *Ramayana* would be fit for the scrap heap. As a spiritual experience, his book is almost unrivalled at least for me. And then, too, I do not swear by every word that is to be found in so many editions published as the *Ramayana* of

Tulsidas. It is the spirit running through the book that holds me spell-bound. I cannot myself subscribe to the prohibition against *Sudras* learning the *Vedas*. Indeed, in my opinion, at the present moment we are all predominantly *Sudras* so long as we are serfs. Knowledge cannot be the prerogative of any class or section. But I can conceive the impossibility of people assimilating higher or subtler truths, unless they have undergone preliminary training, even as those who have not made preliminary preparations are quite unfit to breathe the rarefied atmosphere in high altitudes, or those who have no preliminary training in simple Mathematics are unfit to understand or assimilate higher Geometry or Algebra.

*Young India* : August 27, 1925.

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## CHAPTER VI

### God is Truth

**T**HERE are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. They overwhelm me with wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded be my very life, I hope, I may be prepared to give it.

From the introduction to *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

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In the march towards Truth, anger, selfishness, hatred, etc., naturally give way, for otherwise Truth would be impossible to attain. *A man who is swayed by passions may have good enough intentions, may be truthful in world, but he will never find the Truth. A successful search for Truth means complete deliverance from the dual thong such as of love and hate, happiness and misery.*

From *The Story of My Experiments with Truth : Part IV, Chapter XXXVII.*

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I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world, where all else but God that is Truth is an uncertainty. All that appears and happens about and around us is uncertain, transient. But there is a Supreme Being hidden therein as Certainty, and one would be blessed if one could catch a glimpse of that Certainty and hitch one's waggon to it. The quest for that Truth is the *summum bonum* of life.

From *The Story of My Experiments with Truth : Part III, Chapter XXIII.*

I do not consider myself worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the race of prophets. I am a humble seeker after truth. I am impatient to realise myself, to attain *Moksha* in this very existence. My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh. Thus considered, my service may be regarded as purely selfish. I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the Kingdom of Heaven which is *Moksha*. To attain my end it is not necessary for me to seek the shelter of a cave, I carry one about me, if I would but know it. A cave-dweller can build castles in the air whereas a dweller in a palace like Janak has no castles to build. The cave-dweller who hovers round the world on the wings of thought has no peace. A Janak though living in the midst of 'pomp and circumstance' may have peace that passeth understanding. For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and there through of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the *Gita* I want to live at peace with both friend and foe. Though, therefore, a Mussalman or a Christian or a Hindu may despise me and hate me, I want to love him and serve him even as I would love my wife or son though they hate me. So my Patriotism is for me a stage in my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul.

*Young India* : April 3, 1924.

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The aim of human life is *Moksha*. As a Hindu I believe that *Moksha* is freedom from birth by breaking the bonds of the flesh, by becoming one with God. Now marriage is a hindrance in the attainment of his supreme object, inasmuch as it only tightens the bonds of flesh. Celibacy is a great help inasmuch as it enables one to lead a life of surrender to God.

*Young India* : Nov. 20, 1924.

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What I want to achieve,—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years,—is self-realisation, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end.

From the introduction to *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

*A friend inquired if Gandhiji's aim was just humanitarian in sitting down in the village, just serving the villagers as best as he could.*

“I am here to serve no one else but myself,” said Gandhiji, “to find my own self-realisation through the service of these village-folk. Man’s ultimate aim is the realisation of God, and all his activities,—social, political, religious,—have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God. The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This cannot be done except through one’s country. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himayalan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity.”

**Q.** But some comforts may be necessary even for man’s spiritual advancement. One could not advance himself by identifying himself with the discomfort and squalor of the villager.

**A.** A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore, the ideal of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be a delusion and a snare. The satisfaction of one’s physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one’s narrow self, must meet at a certain point a dead stop before it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness. A man must arrange his physical

and cultural circumstances so that they do not hinder him in his service of humanity, on which all his energies should be concentrated.

*Harijan* : August 29, 1936.

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I want to see God face to face. God I *know* is Truth. For me the only certain means of knowing God is non-violence—*ahimsa*—love. I live for India's freedom and would die for it, because it is part of Truth. Only a free India can worship the true God. I work for India's freedom because my *Swadeshi* teaches me that being born in it and having inherited her culture, I am fittest to serve *her* and *she* has a prior claim to my service. But my patriotism is not exclusive ; it is calculated not only not to hurt any other nation but to benefit all in the true sense of word. India's freedom as conceived by me can never be a menace to the world.

*Young India* : April 3, 1924.

## Humility

**H**UMILITY cannot be an observance by itself. For it does not lend itself to being deliberately practised. It is, however, an indispensable test of *ahimsa*. In one who has *ahimsa* in him it becomes part of his very nature.

A preliminary draft of the rules and regulations of the *Satyagraha Ashram* was circulated among friends, including the late Sir Gurudas Banerji. He suggested that humility should be accorded a place among the observances. This suggestion could not then be accepted for the same reason as I am mentioning here.

But although humility is not one of the observances, it is certainly as essential as, and perhaps even more essential than any one of them. Only it never came to anyone by practice. Truth can be cultivated as well as Love. But to cultivate humility is tantamount to cultivating hypocrisy. Humility must not be here confounded with mere manners or etiquette. One man will sometimes prostrate himself before another, although his heart is full of bitterness against the latter. This is not humility, but cunning. A man may repeat *Ramanama*, or tell his beads all day long, and move in society like a sage; but if he is selfish at heart, he is not meek, but only hypocritical.

A humble person is not himself conscious of his humility. Truth and the like perhaps, admit of measurement, but not humility. Inborn humility can never remain hidden, and yet the possessor is unaware of its existence. The story of Vasishtha and Vishvamitra furnishes a very good case in point. Humility should make the possessor *realise* that he is as nothing. Directly one imagines oneself to be something, there is egotism. If a man who keeps observances is proud of keeping them,

he will lose much if not all of their value. And a man who is proud of his virtue often becomes a curse to society. Society will not appreciate it, and he himself will fail to reap any benefit from it. Only a little thought will suffice to convince us that all creatures are nothing more than a mere atom in this universe. Our existence as embodied beings is purely momentary ; what are a hundred years in eternity ? But if we shatter the chains of egotism, and melt into the ocean of humanity, we share its dignity. To feel that we are something is to set up a barrier between God and ourselves ; to cease feeling that we are something is to become one with God. A drop in the ocean partakes of the greatness of its parent, although it is unconscious of it, but it is dried up as soon as it enters upon an existence independent of the ocean. We do not exaggerate when we say that life on earth is a mere bubble.

A life of service must be one of humility. He who would sacrifice his life for others has hardly time to reserve for himself a place in the sun. Inertia must not be mistaken for humility, as it has been in Hinduism. True humility means most strenuous and constant endeavour entirely directed towards the service of humanity. God is continuously in action without resting for a single moment. If we would serve Him or become one with Him, our activity must be as unwearied as His. There may be momentary rest in store for the drop which is separated from the ocean, but not for the drop in the ocean, which knows no rest. The same is the case with ourselves. As soon as we become one with the ocean in the shape of God, there is no more rest for us, nor indeed do we need rest any longer. Our very sleep is action. For we sleep with the thought of God in our hearts. This restlessness constitutes true rest. This never-ceasing agitation holds the key to peace ineffable. This supreme state of total surrender is difficult to describe, but not beyond the bounds of human experience. It has been attained by many dedicated souls, and may be attained by ourselves as well. This is the goal which we of the *Satyagraha Ashram* have set before ourselves ; all our observances and activities are calculated to assist us in reaching it. We shall reach it some day all unawares if we have truth in us.

—*Yervada Mandir.*



## CHAPTER VII

### Truth

**T**HE word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat* which means being. As nothing is or exists in reality except Truth, that is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that truth is God than to say that God is Truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, names of God such as King of Kings or the All-Mighty are and will remain more usually current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be realised that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God.

And where there is Truth there also is knowledge, pure knowledge. Where is no Truth, there can be no true knowledge. That is why the word *Chit* or knowledge is associated with the name of God. And where there is true knowledge there is always bliss (*Ananda*). Sorrow has no place there. And even as Truth is eternal, so is the bliss derived from it. Hence we know God as *Sat-chit-ananda*, one who combines in Himself Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.

Devotion to this Truth is the sole reason for our existence. All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it will be impossible to observe any principles or rules in life.

Generally speaking, observing the law of Truth is merely understood to mean that we must speak the truth. But we in

the *Ashram* understand the word *Satya* or Truth in a much wider sense. There should be truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who has realised this Truth in perfection, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it, is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never-failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading. •

But how is one to realise this Truth, which may be likened to the philosopher's stone or the cow of plenty? By single-minded devotion (*Abhyasa*) and indifference to every other interest in life: *Varagya*—replies the *Bhagavad Gita*. In spite, however, of such devotion, what may appear as truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. When there is honest effort, it will be realised that what appear to be different truths are like apparently different countless leaves of the same tree. Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? Still we know that He is One. But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in everyone following Truth according to one's lights. Indeed it is one's duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of any one so following Truth, it will be automatically set right for the quest of Truth involves *tapas*—self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self-interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. Directly if one takes to the wrong path one stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore, the pursuit of Truth is True *Bhakti* (devotion). It is the path that leads to God, and therefore there is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the *talisman* by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal.

In this connection we should ponder over the lives and examples of Harishchandra, Prahlad, Ramchandra, Imams Hassan and Hussain, the Christian saints, etc. How beautiful it would be if all of us, young and old, men and women

devoted ourselves wholly to Truth in all that we might do in our waking hours, whether working, eating, drinking or playing till pure dreamless sleep claimed us for her own ! God as Truth has been for me a treasure beyond price, may He be so to everyone of us !

From *Tervada Mandir*.

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## The Meaning of Prayers

**O**FTEN, sir, do you ask us to worship God, to pray but never tell us how to and when to do so. Will you kindly enlighten me? asks a reader of *Navajivan*. Worshipping God is singing the praise of God. Prayer is a confession of one's unworthiness and weakness. God has a thousand names, or rather He is nameless. We may worship or pray to Him by whichever name that pleases us. Some call Him Rama, and some Krishna, others call Him Rahim, and yet others call Him God. All worship the same spirit, but as all foods do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooseth the name according to his associations, and He being the In-Dweller. All-Powerful and Omniscient knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our deserts.

Worship or prayer, therefore, is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart. And that is why, it can be performed equally by the dumb and the stammerer, by the ignorant and the stupid. And the prayers of those whose tongues are nectrated but whose hearts are full of poison are never heard. He, therefore, who would pray to God, must cleanse his heart. Rama was not only on the lips of Hanuman, He was enthroned in his heart. He gave Hanuman exhaustless strength. In His strength he lifted the mountain and crossed the ocean. It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide-awake consciousness of God within. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased, he is spiritually healthy : physically pure, he rolls in spiritual riches.

“But how is the heart to be cleansed to this extent?” one might well ask. The language of the lips is easily taught but

who can teach the language of the heart? Only the *bhakta*—the true devotee—knows it and can teach it. The *Gita* has defined the *bhakta* in three places, and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a *bhakta* is hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have therefore suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellow-men. That is why Narshinha Mehta who 'saw and knew' sang :—*He is a true Vaishnav who knows to melt at others' woe.* Such was Abu Ben Adham. He served his fellow-men, and therefore his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woe-begone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a *bhakta* therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he who regards the 'suppressed' classes as untouchables serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor, and trots out lame excuses, does not know the meaning of service. An able-bodied wretch deserve no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor, inviting them to do likewise, serves God as no one else does. *He who gives Me even a trifle as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of bhakti is my servant,* says the Lord in the *Bhagavad Gita*. And He hath His footstool where live the humble, the lowliest and lost. Spinning, therefore, for such people is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.

Prayer, therefore, may be done by any name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle, and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart truly pray; the Hindu and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.

*Young India* : September 25, 1925

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## CHAPTER VIII

### Self-Introspection

**I**T is now nearly ten weeks since Gandhiji was advised by his doctors to avoid all activities involving physical and mental strain of any kind. During his stay in Ahmedabad, his condition showed a steady progress towards normal, and though he literally followed the doctors' instructions regarding writing and interview, he again began to interest himself in the activities around him and one day walked to the *Harijan Ashram* to meet the inmates there. He saw the girls in the hostel, visited the *Harijan* families and accepted a gift of *Khadi*, woven out of the yarn spun by the girls of the hostel and by the *Harijan* and non-*Harijan* inmates of the *Ashram*. It was resolved that in future no *Khadi* should be purchased for the girls, but that they would be clad in *Khadi*, woven out of their own yarn. After exchanging a few words with some of those who had gathered to meet him on the prayer ground, he addressed them as follows :

“Though I have been having rest for the last two months or more I have been constantly thinking of rules and the vows of our *Ashram*. Quite a number of the *Ashram* inmates, old and young, have given up or have failed to live up to the vows of the *Ashram*, and I wondered if that meant that there was anything inherently defective about those vows. But I came to the conclusion that there was no such thing and that it was well that we had kept those vows in front of us and tried each according to his or her ability, to observe them and that there was absolutely no cause for regret that the vows had been taken. I am a devotee of the *Gita* and a firm believer

in the inexorable Law of *Karma*. Even the least little tripping or stumbling is not without its cause and I have wondered why one who has tried to follow the *Gita* in thought, word and deed, should have any ailment. The doctors have assured me that this trouble of high blood pressure is entirely the result of mental strain and worry. If that is true, it is likely that I have been unnecessarily worrying myself, unnecessarily fretting and secretly harbouring passions like anger, lust, etc. The fact that any event or incident should disturb my mental equilibrium, in spite of my serious efforts, means not that the *Gita* ideal is defective but that my devotion to it is defective. The *Gita* ideal is true for all time, my understanding of it and observance of it is full of flaws. The same is the case about the vows. The vows are true for all time, our observance of them has been defective. The very contemplation of these vows is a source of perennial joy to me."

The vows are :

*Non-violence, truth, non-stealing, brahmacharya, non-possessions body-labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal respect for all religions, swadeshi (restricting oneself to the use and service of one's nearest surroundings in preference to those remote), spirit of unexclusive brotherhood—these eleven vows should be observed in a spirit of humility.*  
M. D.

Haryan : February 29, 1936.

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The detachment prescribed by the *Gita* is the hardest thing to achieve, and yet it so absolutely necessary for perfect peace and for the vision of both the little self and the greatest self.

Haryan : February 6, 1937.

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Now to come to the question of renunciation *versus* action : I believe in the doctrine of renunciation but I hold that renunciation should be sought for in and through action. That action is the *sine qua non* of life in the body, that the Wheel of Life cannot go on even for a second without involving some sort of action, goes without saying. Renunciation can, herefore, in these circumstances, only mean detachment or

freedom of the spirit from action, even while the body is engaged in action. A follower of the path of renunciation seeks to attain it not by refraining from all activity but by carrying it on in a perfect spirit of detachment and altruism as a pure trust. Thus a man may engage in farming, spinning, or any other activity without departing from the path of renunciation, provided one does so merely for selfless service and remains free from the taint of egoism or attachment. It remains for those therefore who, like myself, hold this view of renunciation to discover for themselves how far the principle of *ahimsa* is compatible with life in the body and how it can be applied to acts of everyday life. The very virtue of a *dharma* is that it is universal, that its practice is not the monopoly of the few, but must be the privilege of all. And it is my firm belief that the scope of Truth and *ahimsa* is world-wide. That is why I find an ineffable joy in dedicating my life to researches in Truth and *ahimsa* and I invite others to share it with me by doing likewise.

*Young India* : October 25, 1928

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## Karma Alone Powerless

SO many things have happened in my life for which I had intense longing, but which I could never have achieved myself. And I have always said to my co-workers that it was in answer to my prayer. I did not say to them it was in answer to my intellectual effort to lose myself in the Divinity in me ! The easiest and the correct thing for me was to say " God has seen me through my difficulty."

" But that you deserved by your *Karma*. God is Justice and not Mercy. You are a good man and good things happen to you," contended Dr. Fabian

No, I fear, I am not good enough for things to happen like that. If I went about with that philosophical conception of *Karma*, I should often become a pauper. My *Karma* would not come to my help. Although I believe in the inexorable Law of *Karma*, I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is a strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more *Karma*, to undo the past and add to the present. It is, therefore, wrong to say that because my past is good, good is happening at present. The past would be soon exhausted and I have to build up the future with prayer. I tell you *Karma* alone is powerless. " Ignite this match," I say to myself, and yet I cannot, if there is no co-operation from without. Before I strike the match my hand is paralysed or I have only one match and the wind blows it out. Is it an accident or God or Higher Power ? Well, I prefer to use the language of my ancestors or of children. I am no better than a child. We may try to talk learnedly and of books, but when it comes to face facts—when we are face to face with a calamity—we behave like children and begin to cry and pray and our intellectual belief gives no satisfaction !

*Harijan* : August 19, 1939.

Q. You are living a guided life. Could you kindly tell me your experience of guidance ?

A. I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He, therefore, does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore, I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our actions, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

Q. Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God ?

A. I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.

*Harijan* : March 23, 1940.

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## CHAPTER IX

### The Golden Key

**L**ET me for a few moments consider what Hinduism consists of, and what it is that has fired so many saints about whom we have historical record. Why has it contributed so many philosophers to the world? What is it in Hinduism that has so enthused its devotees for centuries? Did they see untouchability in Hinduism and still enthuse over it? In the midst of my struggle against untouchability, I have been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalema*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we *John*, Chapters 3—16 of the Bible. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them? Some have said, and not without good reason, the *Gayatri* answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the *Gayatri Mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then as you are aware I have, for years past, been swearing by the *Bhagavad Gita*, and have said that it answers to my difficulties and has been my *Kamadhenu*, my guide, my open sesame, on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a prayerful study before the *Kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

But I have fixed upon one *Mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the *Ishopanishad*. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in

Yervada Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the *Upanishads* and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the *Ishopanishads* were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

Now this *Mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is,

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्

It means, as I would translate : *All this that we see in this great Universe is pervaded by God.* Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them :

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः

I divide these into two and translate them thus : *Renounce it and enjoy it.* There is another rendering which means the same thing, thou : *Enjoy what He gives you.* Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part,

मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्वनम्

which means : *Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession.* All the other *Mantras* of that ancient *Upanishad* are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *Mantra*. As I read the *Mantra* in the light of the *Gita* or the *Gita* in the light of the *Mantra*, I find that the *Gita* is a commentary on this *Mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the socialist and the communist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true—and I hold it to be true—you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *Mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the Universe ? The three other parts of the *Mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the creator

of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the *Mantra* closes with this magnificent thought : *Do not covet anybody's possession.* The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter. No doubt it will not satisfy the aspiration of him who does not believe in God and His undisputed sovereignty. It is no idle thing that the Maharaja of Travancore is called *Padmanabhadras*. It is a great thought, we know that God Himself has taken the title of *Daseanudas*—servant of servants. If all the princes would call themselves servants of God, they would be correctly describing themselves, but they cannot be servants of God unless they are servants of the people. And if *zamindars* and monied men and all who have possessions would treat themselves as trustees and perform the act of renunciation that I have described, this world would indeed be a blessed world to live in. (From a speech at the public meeting in Quilon).

*Harijan* : January 30, 1937.

*God the Ruler pervades all there is in this Universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possessions.*

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## CHAPTER X

### Brahman & Non-Brahman Question

Q. We do not understand your emphasis on *varna-dharma*. Can you justify the present caste system? What is your definition of *varna*?

A. '*Varna*' means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The law of *varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or chooses his father's profession. *Varna* therefore is in a way the law of heredity. *Varna* is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus, but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of nature—the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation. Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered so did the law of *varna*. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

*Varna* has nothing to do with caste. Caste is an excrescence, just like untouchability, upon Hinduism. All the excrescences that are emphasised to-day were never part of Hinduism. But don't you find similar ugly excrescences in Christianity and Islam also?

Fight them as much as you like. Down with the monster of the caste that masquerades in the guise of *varna*. It is this travesty of *varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the law of *varna* is largely responsible both for

our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and impoverishment, as it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith.

But in quarrelling with the present monstrous form and monstrous practices to which the original law has been reduced, do not fight the law itself.

Q. How many *varnas* are there?

A. Four *varnas*, though it is not a rigid division inherent in *varna* itself. The *Rishis* after incessant experiments and research arrived at this fourfold division—the four ways of earning one's livelihood.

Q. Logically, therefore, there are as many *varnas* as there are professions?

A. Not necessarily. The different professions can easily be brought under the four main divisions—that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service. So far as the world is concerned, the dominant profession is the wealth-producing, just as *grihasth-ashrama* is the most dominant amongst all *ashramas*, *Vaishya* is the keynote among the *varnas*. The defender is not wanted if there is no wealth and property. The first two and the fourth are necessary because of the third. The first will always be very few because of the severe discipline required for it, the second must be few in a well-ordered society, and so the fourth.

Q. If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what *varna* does he belong to?

A. According to the Hindu belief he belongs to the *varna* in which he is born, but by not living up to it he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being—a *patita*.

Q. *Shudra* does an act which belongs to a *Brahman* by birth. Does he become a *patita*?

A. A *Shudra* has as much right to knowledge as has a *Brahman*, but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain his livelihood through teaching. In ancient times there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. To-day he does, because

he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs. 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain, and a physician like Hakim Sahib thinks that he must charge Rs. 1,000 a day for his medical advice.

Q. But may not a man follow a profession after his heart ?

A. But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his father. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession, on the contrary it is noble. What we find to-day are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' calling, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone-by there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was an honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal when the motive was purely philanthropic.

Q. All that is under ideal conditions. But what do you propose to-day when everyone is hankering after paying professions ?

A. It is a sweeping generalisation. Put together the number of boys studying in schools and colleges and determine the percentage of boys going in for learned professions. Highway robbery is not open to everyone. The present seems to be an agitation for highway robbery. How many can become lawyers and Government servants ? Those who can be legitimately occupied in earning wealth are *Vaishyas*. Even there, when their profession becomes a highway robbery, it is hateful. There cannot be millions of millionaires.

Q. You have been saying that the law of *varna* curbs our worldly ambition. How ?

A. When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. *Varna* is the best form of insurance for



happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realisation or sell my soul for a mass of pottage.

Q. You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. To-day those who follow their father's professions have no spiritual culture at all—their very *varna* unfits them for it.

A. We are talking with crooked notions of *varna*. When *varna* was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not even learn the *Gita*, if everyone who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to rearrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have to-day, and we cannot do it unless we follow the law of *varna*.

Q. You will excuse us if we go back to the same question over and over again. We want to understand it properly. What is the *varna* of a man practising different professions at different times?

A. It may not make any difference in his *varna* so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profession from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth degrades himself and falls from *varna*.

Q. A *Shudra* may have all the qualities of a *Brahman* and yet may not be called a *Brahman*?

A. He may not be called a *Brahman* in this birth. And it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a *varna* to which he is not born. It is a sign of true humility.

Q. Do you believe that qualities attaching to *varna* are inherited and not acquired?

A. They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We

should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

Q. Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character ?

A. That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. But you and I do not need to go deeper into this question for understanding the law of *varna* as I have endeavoured to explain to you. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier, but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

Q. Caste, as we see it to-day, consists only in restrictions, about inter-dining and intermarriage. Does preservation of *varna* then mean keeping these restrictions ?

A. No, not at all. In its purest state, there can be no restrictions.

Q. Can they be omitted ?

A. They can be, and *varna* is preserved even by marrying into other *varnas*.

Q. Then the mother's *varna* will be affected ?

A. A wife follows the *varna* of her husband.

Q. Is the doctrine of *varnadharma*, as you have expounded it, to be found in our *Shastras*, or is to your own ?

A. Not my own. I derive it from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Q. Do you approve of the doctrine as given in *Manusmriti* ?

A. The principle is there. But the application does not appeal to me fully. There are parts of the book which are open to grave objections. I hope that they are later interpolations.

Q. Does not *Manusmriti* contain a lot of injustice ?

A. Yes, a lot of injustice to women and the so-called lower 'castes'. All is not *Shastras* that goes by that name. The *Shastras* so-called therefore need to be read with much caution.

Q. But you go by the *Bhagavad Gita*. It says *varna* is according to *guna* and *karma*. How did you bring in birth ?

A. I swear by the *Bhagavad Gita* because it is the only book in which I find nothing to cavil at. It lays down principles

"Well then, why should you be any less than Bertrand Russell? You have a father who will place no obstacles in your way and a husband who will go the whole length with you."

"No, no," said Gandhiji summing up. "This pledge is absolutely essential. You cut at the root of the movement, if you do not have it, and you will justify the attitude of the *Sanatanists*. As you have to discharge the financial obligations, you have to discharge the moral also, and I must say that, just as I should rue the day on which I collected the money, if I found that the money was ill-spent, in the same way I should feel guilty if I found that I was not discharging the moral obligation. You ought to have realised the implications of the movement when you joined it. I am not after extinguishing all differences. Who can destroy natural differences? Is there no difference between a *Brahman*, a dog and a dog-eater? And yet the *Gita* says :

*The men who have realised the Truth look with an equal eye on a learned and cultured Brahman, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater.*

There is a difference between them but the man who knows the science of life will say that there is no difference between them in status, as there is none between an elephant and an ant, a savage and a savant. Of course, the savage may be awe-struck before a savant; but the latter should not have any sense of superiority. No, we are all equal in the eye of the law and God. That is the ideal we have to live up to."

"But, then, there should be no master, no servant?"

"No. There is a beautiful Latin saying *Primus inter Pares*--First among equals, and the Master or the President will be the first among the equals. I can see that it is difficult to practise the thing, that is why you will say in your pledge you will strive your utmost to live up to your belief. That we cannot practise it at once, or fully, does not show that the pledge is wrong; it shows that human nature can be despicable. No, you have got to understand that this is a fundamental thing of the movement. Otherwise, you will justify the charge that it is a dodge."

*Harijan* : January 11, 1935.

*varnadharma*, though for the removal of untouchability I went to Vykom. I am the author of a Congress resolution for propagation of *Khadi*, establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity, and removal of untouchability, the three pillars of *Swaraj*. But I have never placed establishment of *varnashramadharma* as the fourth pillar. You cannot therefore accuse me of placing a wrong emphasis on *varnashramadharma*.

Q. Do you know that many of your followers distort your teaching ?

A. Do I not know it ? I know that I have many followers only so-called.

Q. Buddhism was driven out of India because *Brahmans* dominated the organisation. Similarly they will drive Hinduism out, if it does not serve their end.

A. Let them dare. But I am not certain that Buddhism has gone out of India. India is the country that imbibed most of the spirit of the Buddha as well as Christianity from the spirit of the Christ. They were successful in driving out Buddhism, because they had assimilated the central teaching of the Buddha.

Q. The same *Brahman* who assimilated the good things of Buddhism has committed the worst crimes, worse than the Amritsar wrong, by not allowing untouchables to enter into temples and imposing on them cruel disabilities.

A. You are right to a certain extent. But you are wrong in fixing the guilt on *Brahmans*. It is the whole of Hinduism that is responsible. *Varnadharma* having become distorted gave rise to untouchability. There was no deliberate wickedness, but the result was a human tragedy.

Q. But so long as you use the word '*varnashrama-dharma*' it brings in with it the evil associations of to-day.

A. The moral is : destroy the evil association and restore *varnadharma* to its purity.

Q. There is an utter state of confusion. How shall we go back ?

A. All I have to say to you is, do not destroy the foundation ; let us try to purify. Instead, you are trying to deliver a new religion to receive which no one is prepared. *Brahmanism* is synonymous with Hinduism. That is to say, the only term we

had for Hinduism was *Brahmanism*, i.e., *Brahma Vidya*, and in trying to destroy that you are trying to destroy Hinduism. Fight the *Brahman* inch by inch, when he encroaches on your rights and try to reform him. But it is no use blackguarding every *Brahman*. There are *Brahmans* and *Brahmans*. One is an out and out reformer, the other is an opponent of reform. You must range the best of the reformer *Brahmans* on your side, and with their help carry out the constructive part of your programme, which can bring about the salvation both of *Brahmans* and non-*Brahmans*.

Fight the opponents of reform and tell them, 'We shall not call you *Brahmans* if you pursue wealth and power, and if you are not learned and are not able to teach us the true religion.' Then you will not evoke any opposition from them. You will carry on a fierce agitation to bring about reform, you will boycott the schools and temples which distinguish against any non-*Brahmans*. You will insist upon priests of pure character, of learning and without wordly ambition. You may build new temples if the old ones refuse to admit the so-called untouchables.

Then there is the question of inter-dining. I should not make that a ground for a quarrel with anybody. But I should boycott a function where there is a dividing line.

Then I would fraternise with untouchables and try to deal with them as I should with a blood brother, and break to pieces all little castes and sections. And therefore when I marry my boy I will go out of my way and seek a girl from other sub-sections. We are really so hide-bound to-day by wretched custom that you will not give me a girl to domicile in Gujarat, and you will not take a girl from Gujarat to settle in Tamil Nad.

Then I would give the untouchables religious education, a grounding in the principles of Hinduism and morality. They are leading a purely animal life to-day, I would induce them to refrain from eating forbidden food and live a pure and clean life. You can easily expand these questions and work out a big constructive programme.

Q. We see you swear by Hinduism. May we know what Hinduism has done for us? Is it not a legacy of ugly superstitions and practices?

A. I thought I had made it clear already. *Varnashramadharma* itself is a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world. Hinduism saved us from *bhaya*, i.e., peril. If Hinduism had not come to my rescue, the only course for me would have been suicide. I remain a Hindu because Hinduism is a heaven which makes the world worth living in. From Hinduism was born Buddhism. What we see to-day is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it. Otherwise it would require no pleading from me in its behalf, but would speak for itself, even as if I was absolutely pure I would not need to speak to you. God does not speak with His tongue, and man in the measure that he comes near God becomes like God. Hinduism teaches me that my body is a limitation of the power of the soul within.

Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilizations. Cast a look round you. Where is Rome and where is Greece? Can you find to-day anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilisation? Then come to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say, "Yes, I see here ancient India still living." True, there are dung-heaps, too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

Among its many contributions the idea of man's identity with dumb creation is a unique one. To me cow-worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. Its freedom from the modern proselytisation is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says, 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business so live the life, and then we will leave its influence on ages. Then take its contribution in men, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

Then there is the contribution of the four *ashramas*, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *brahmacharis*, but not as an institution, whereas in India everybody had to go through the first *ashrama*. What a grand conception it was! To-day our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.

There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said forty years ago that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

To-day *varnashramadharma* and Hinduism are misrepresented and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not.

*Young India* : November 24, 1927.

If man's, as distinguished from lower animal's, function is to know God, it follows that he must not devote the chief part of his life to making experiments in finding out what occupation will best suit him for earning his livelihood. On the contrary, he will recognise that it is best for him to follow his father's occupation, and devote his spare time and talent to qualifying himself for the task to which mankind is called.

*Young India* : November 17, 1927.

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Let it not be said against this law of *verna* that it makes life dull and robs it of all ambition. In my opinion the law of *verna* alone makes life liveable by *all* and restores to ambition, the only object worthy of it, namely self-realisation. To-day we seem to think of and strive for material pursuits which are in their very nature transitory, and we do this almost to the exclusion of the one thing needful.

*Young India* : November 17, 1927

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It is a universal law, stated in so many words by Hinduism. It is a law of spiritual economics. Nations of the West and Islam itself unwittingly are obliged to follow that law. It has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. The customs about eating, drinking and marriage are no integral part of *Varnashrama-dharma*. It was a law discovered by your ancestors and my ancestors, the *rishi's* who saw that if they were to give the best part of their lives to God and to the world, and not to themselves, they must recognise that it is the law of heredity. It is a law designed to set free man's energy for higher pursuits in life.

*Young India* : August 22, 1927.

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My *Varnashrama* enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be he Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi whatever he is. My *Varnashrama* accommodates a pariah girl under my own roof as my own daughter. My *Varnashrama* accommodates many *Panchama* families with whom I dine with the greatest pleasure,—to dine with whom is a privilege. My *Varnashrama* refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my *Varnashrama* compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face.

*Young India* : September 22, 1927.

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## Prejudice and Insolence

© OCCUPATION is not test of superiority or otherwise with Gandhiji. The following appeared in Young India of 17th November, 1921 :

A correspondent from Tanjore District writes saying that he and his brother though *Brahmans* felt that rather than lead a lazy life, they should do some work and they 'turned their hands to the plough.' So they began agriculture. Thereupon their fellow-villagers became disgusted and excommunicated them. They, however remained firm in their resolve. When the *Shankaracharya* of Kumbakonam visited their part of the district, they went with their offering which was rejected, because they had committed the sin of labouring for their livelihood. My correspondent tells me he is not at all put out by the *Shankaracharya's* action. I congratulate the brothers on their public spirit. Excommunication from a tyrannical society is indeed a reward of merit and should be welcomed. To say that a *Brahman* should not touch the plough is a parody of *Varnashrama* and a prostitution of the meaning of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Surely the qualities predominantly ascribed to the different divisions are not denied to the others. Is bravery to be the prerogative only of the *Kshatriya* and restraint only of the *Brahman*? Are *Brahmans*, *Kshatriyas* and *Shudras* not to protect the cow? Can anyone remain a Hindu without readiness to die for the cow? Yet strangely enough, I have a letter from the Madras Presidency seriously telling me, that cow-protection has nothing to do with any but the *Vaishyas*. When there is so much ignorance combined with insolence, the best thing to do is to incur all risks and pursue the path of reform expecting time to prove the truth of one's position. If we combine love with firmness, we shall disarm all opposition in the end. Reformers may neither relent nor become angry.

Young India : December 8, 1920.

## CHAPTER XI

### A Plea for Equility

**T**O the women of Delhi, who had come in large numbers to hear him, Gandhiji made a fervent appeal to shed untouchability and to realize the equality for all human beings. "In the eyes of God," he said, "who is the Creator of all, His creatures are all equal. Had He made any distinctions of high and low between man and woman, they would have been visible as are the distinctions between, say, an elephant and an ant. But he has endowed all human beings partially with the same shape and the same natural wants. If you consider *Harijans* untouchables because they perform sanitary service, what mother has not performed such service for her children? It is the height of injustice to consider the *Harijans*, who are the most useful servants of society, as untouchables and outcastes. I have undertaken this tour to awaken the minds of Hindu sisters to a sense of this sin. It can never be an act of merit to look down upon any human being as inferior to us. We are all worshippers of one God whom we worship under different names. We must, therefore, realise our essential unity and give up untouchability as well as the spirit of superiority and inferiority between human beings." M. D.

*Harijan* : December 22, 1933.

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I have declared times without number from various public platforms that it is the prayer of my heart that if I should fail to obtain *moksha* in this very birth, I might be born a *Bhangi* in my next. I believe in *Varnashrama* both according to birth and to *Karma*. But I do not regard *Bhangi's* as in any sense a low order. On the contrary, I know many *Bhangis* who are worthy of reverence. On the other hand there are *Brahmans* going about

whom it would be very difficult to regard with any reverence. Holding these views, therefore, if there is a rebirth in store for me, I wish to be born a pariah in the midst of pariahs, because thereby I would be able to render more effective service to them and also be in a better position to plead with other communities on their behalf.

*Young India* : January 22, 1925.

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No human being could be unclean by birth. If they would search for unclean things, they had only to dive into their own minds, where they would find a multitude of evil thoughts worthy of being treated as outcastes.

*Harijan* : May 4, 1934.

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## The Pledge

**T**HE reader will study the new Constitution published elsewhere in these columns and notice some of the most important changes. The least that he can do, under the constitution, is to be an Associate of the Sangh, the most he can do is to give himself heart and soul to the movement for the eradication of untouchability. Lest there should be any half-heartedness about this, lest even the workers themselves should be harbouring this sin, all unconsciously, the Sangh has provided in the constitution for a pledge to be signed by all workers. Out of the several hours' serious discussion which was devoted to the constitution before it was passed, quite a considerable portion was taken up by the pledge, the clause which taxed the member's attention most being the very simple-looking one: *I do not consider any human being as inferior to me in status and I shall strive my utmost to live up to that belief.*

Not that any of the workers had any doubt about the truth of the general proposition that everyone in God's creation is equal in status, but the bearing of this on the question of untouchability was not properly realised. The discussion brought it out more clearly than ever that the whole question was rooted in the superiority complex, under which the mind of the members laboured. "Why," some of them asked, "should this be put into a pledge? And this pledge seems more sociological than humanitarian. Eradication of untouchability is one thing, but this levelling of status seems to be an altogether different thing. Are we to regard our servants as equal to us in status? You seem to be driving us slowly to social and economic revolution."

"I am surprised that the truth dawns upon you so late," said Gandhiji. "You are very much mistaken, if you feel that

*Harijans* expect anything less from you. You may be quite ready to treat a few *Harijans* on terms of equality, unless you are prepared to treat all the sweepers and scavengers—and not merely a *Harijan* judge sitting on a Court bench—you have not rid yourself of the evil. The very idea of superiority is most loathsome. It is at the back of most of the race feuds in the world. The thing is universal. But among us, I am afraid, it is in its cruelest form, because it is claimed to have got a religious sanction."

"You are right, Mahatmaji", said one of the members, "there are some members on our Board who feel that *Brahmans* are superior to *Vaishyas*."

"They have no business to be on our Board. Removal of untouchability means one thing for a *Harijan*, another for a caste Hindu, and quite another for a *Harijan* sevak."

"I quite see the thing", said Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru, in a plaintive tone, "but how can I sign the pledge, when I know that I do not treat my servant as equal to me in status? My peace of mind will go."

"It need not go. You will treat him as a member of your family."

"It is easier said than done, Mahatmaji. How can I claim to treat him as a member of my family, when I sleep on a cot or a sofa, and he stands at the door?"

"You can, for the simple reason that you will sleep on your featherbed, not because you are superior to him, but it has become a need with you. No, no. You are unnecessarily afraid. It is more a mental adjustment than physical. I shall give you just one or two instances. When I went to Lady Astor's, she brought out all her servants to shake hands with me. They hesitated, but then they saw that they did not need to do so. Lloyd George, when I was his guest for a few hours, encouraged all his servants, as he would his own children, to hand me their autograph books for my signature."

"I know, Mahatmaji, I know. Bertrand Russell also treats his servants as equals."

"Well then, why should you be any less than Bertrand Russell? You have a father who will place no obstacles in your way and a husband who will go the whole length with you."

"No, no," said Gandhiji summing up. "This pledge is absolutely essential. You cut at the root of the movement, if you do not have it, and you will justify the attitude of the *Sanatanists*. As you have to discharge the financial obligations you have to discharge the moral also, and I must say that just as I should rue the day on which I collected the money if I found that the money was ill-spent, in the same way I should feel guilty if I found that I was not discharging the moral obligation. You ought to have realised the implication of the movement when you joined it. I am not after extinguishing all differences. Who can destroy natural differences? I see no difference between a *Brahman*, a dog and a dog-eater. And yet the *Gita* says :

*The men who have realised the Truth look with an equal eye on a learned and cultured Brahman, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater.*

There is a difference between them but the man who knows the science of life will say that there is no difference between them in status, as there is none between an elephant and an ant, a savage and a savant. Of course the savage may be awe-struck before a savant; but the latter should not have any sense of superiority. No, we are all equal in the eye of the law and God. That is the ideal we have to live up to."

"But, then, there should be no master, no servant?"

"No. There is a beautiful Latin saying *Primus inter Pares*--First among equals, and the Master or the President will be the first among the equals. I can see that it is difficult to practise the thing, that is why you will say in your pledge you will strive your utmost to live up to your belief. That we cannot practise it at once or fully, does not show that the pledge is wrong; it shows that human nature can be despicable. No, you have got to understand that this is a fundamental thing of the movement. Otherwise, you will justify the charge that it is a dodge."

*Harijan* : January 11, 1935

A *Sanatanist Pandit* met Gandhiji on the way to Bezwada and tried to understand his position. Gandhiji argued the whole case for reform, in the course of which he said, "You should realise that there are *Shastras* who claim to be *Sanatanists* and who support the reformers' contention. How am I to reject their testimony as false? They purify me in my opinion that untouchability has no sanction in the *Shastras*. I do believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishadas*, the *Smritis* and the *Puranas*. But to me the *Gita* is the key to a knowledge of the *Shastra*. It enunciates the principles on which all conduct must be used. It sums up the whole of the *Shastras*, and therefore absolves laymen from having to explore the other books. But I go a step further. The *Vedas* are not the four books known as such. They contain only fragments of the originals. Eternal truth cannot be buried in or confined in the printed books. The *Vedas* are, therefore, indefinable and unwritten. They reside in one's heart. And our *Shastra*, tell us what discipline and study are necessary for opening out the heart for receiving the truth. One's experience, therefore, must be the final guide. The written word undoubtedly helps, but even that has to be interpreted and when there are conflicting interpretations, the seeker is the final arbiter. I had to make my choice. Years ago I made it and came to the conclusion that the *Shastras* did not countenance untouchability as we practise it to-day." M. D.

*Harijan* : December 22, 1933.

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## Hinduism in Danger

**I** SPEAK with a due sense of my responsibility that this untouchability is a curse that is eating into the vitals of Hinduism, and I often feel that unless we take due precautions and remove this curse from our midst, Hinduism itself is in danger of destruction. That in this age of reason, in this age of wide travel, in this age of a comparative study of religions, there should be found people, some of whom are educated, to uphold the hideous doctrine of treating a single human being as an untouchable or unapproachable or unseeable because of his birth, passes my comprehension. As a lay humble student of Hinduism, and claiming to be one desirous of practising Hinduism in the spirit and to the letter, let me tell you that I have found no warrant or support for this terrible doctrine. Let us not deceive ourselves into the belief that everything that is written in Sanskrit and printed in *Shastras* has any binding effect upon us. That which is opposed to the fundamental maxims of morality, that which is opposed to trained reason, cannot be claimed as *Shashtra*, no matter how ancient it may be. There is enough warrant for the proposition that I have just stated in the *Vedas*, in the *Mahabharata* and in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

*Young India* : October 20, 1927.

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## CHAPTER XII

### Swadeshi Defined

**A**FTER much thinking, I have arrived at a definition of *Swadeshi* that perhaps best illustrates my meaning. *Swadeshi* is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion, that is, the use of my immediate religious surrounding. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting. It is suggested that such *Sawdeshi*, if reduced to practice will lead to the millenium. And as we do not abandon our pursuit after the millenium, because we do not expect quite to reach it within our times, so may we not abandon *Swadeshi*, even though it may not be fully attained for generations to come.

*Young India* : June 21, 1919.

## The Law of Swadeshi

**S**WADESHI is the law of laws enjoined by the present age. Spiritual laws, like Nature's laws, need no enacting : they are self-acting. But through ignorance or other causes man often neglects or disobeys them. It is then that vows are needed to steady one's course. A man who is by temperament a vegetarian needs no vow to strengthen this vegetarianism. For the sight of animal food, instead of tempting him, would only excite his disgust. The law of *Swadeshi* is ingrained in the basic nature of man but it has to-day sunk into oblivion. Hence the necessity for the vow of *Swadeshi*. In its ultimate and spiritual sense *Swadeshi* stands for the final emancipation of the human soul from its earthly bondage. For this earthly tabernacle is not its natural or permanent abode, it is a hindrance in its onward journey, it stands in the way of its realising its oneness with other lives. A votary of *Swadeshi*, therefore, in striving to identify himself with the entire creation, seeks to be emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.

If this interpretation of *Swadeshi* be correct then it follows that its votary will as a first duty dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest but the exclusion or the sacrifice would be apparent only. Pure service of one's neighbours can never, from its very nature, result in disservice to those who are remotely situated, rather the contrary. *As with the individual so with the Universe* is an unfailing principle which we would do well to lay to heart. On the other hand a man who allows himself to be lured by the 'distant scene' and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition but fails in his duty towards the neighbours also. Take a concrete instance. In the particular place where I live I have certain persons as my neighbours, some relations and dependents. Naturally, they all feel, as they have a right to, that they have

a claim on me and look to me for help and support. Suppose now I leave them all at once and set out to serve people in a distant place. My decision would throw my little world of neighbours and dependents out of gear while my gratuitous knight-errantry would more likely than not disturb the atmosphere in the new place. Thus a culpable neglect of my immediate neighbours and an unintended disservice to the people whom I wish to serve would be the first fruits of my violation of the principle of *Swadeshi*.

It is not difficult to multiply such instances. That is why the *Gita* says : *It is better to die performing one's duty or Swadharma, but Paradharma, or another's duty, is fraught with danger.* Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment this gives us the law of *Swadeshi*. What the *Gita* says with regard to *Swadharma* equally applies to *Swadeshi* also, for *Swadeshi* is *Swadharma* applied to one's immediate environment.

It is only when the doctrine of *Swadeshi* is wrongly understood that mischief results, e.g., it would be a travesty of the doctrine of *Swadeshi*, if to coddle my family I set about grabbing money by all means fair or foul. The law of *Swadeshi* requires me no more than to discharge my legitimate obligations towards my family by just means, and the attempt to do so will reveal to me the Universal Code of conduct. The practice of *Swadeshi* can never do harm to anyone and if it does it is not *Swadharma* but egotism that moves me.

There may come occasions when a votary of *Swadeshi* may be called upon to sacrifice his family at the altar of universal service. Such an act of willing immolation will then constitute the highest service rendered to the family. *Whosoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whosoever loses his life for the Lord's sake will find it*, holds good for the family group no less than the individual. Take another instance. Supposing there is an outbreak of the plague in my village and in trying to serve the victims of the epidemic, I, my wife and children and all the rest of my family are wiped out of existence, then in inducing those dearest and nearest to join me, I will not have acted as the destroyer of my family but on the contrary as its truest friend. In *Swadeshi* there is no room for selfishness, or if there is

selfishness in it, it is of the highest type which is not different from the highest altruism. *Swadeshi* in its purest form is the acme of universal service.

It was by following this line of argument that I hit upon *Khadi* as a necessary and the most important corollary of the principle of *Swadeshi* in its application to society. "What is the kind of service," I asked myself, "that the teeming millions of India most need at the present time, that can be easily understood and appreciated by all, that is easy to perform and will at the same time enable the crores of our semi-starved countrymen to live?" and the reply came that it is the universalization of *Khadi* the spinning wheel alone that can fulfil these conditions.

Let no one suppose that the practice of *Swadeshi* through *Khadi* would harm the foreign millowners. A thief who is weaned from his vice or is made to return the property that he has stolen is not harmed thereby; on the contrary he is the gainer consciously in the one case, unconsciously in the other. Similarly if all the opium addicts or the drunkards in the world were to shake themselves free from their vice, the canteen keepers or the opium vendors who would be deprived of their customers could not be said to be losers. They would be the gainers in the truest sense of the word. The elimination of the "wages of sin" is never a loss either to the individual concerned or to society; it is pure gain.

It is the greatest delusion to suppose that the duty of *Swadeshi* begins and ends with merely spinning so much yarn anyhow and wearing *Khadi* made from it. *Khadi* is the first indispensable step towards the discharge of *Swadeshi Dharma* towards society. One often meets men who wear *Khadi* but in all other things indulge their taste for foreign manufactures with a vengeance. Such men cannot be said to be practising *Swadeshi*. They are simply following the fashion. A votary of *Swadeshi* will carefully study his environment and try to help his neighbours wherever possible by giving preference to local manufactures even if they are of an inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere. He will try to remedy their defects but will not give them up because of their defects and take to foreign manufactures.

But even *Swadeshi* like any other good thing can be ridden to death if it is made a fetish. That is a danger that must be guarded against. To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting national time and money to promote manufactures in one's country for which it is not suited would be criminal folly and a negation of the *Swadeshi* spirit. A true votary of *Swadeshi* will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner, he will not be moved by antagonism towards anybody on earth, *Swadeshi* is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest *Ahimsa*, i. e., love.

*Young India* : June 18, 1931.

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## The Churkha in the Gita

**T**HE reader will be interested to know that my belief is derived largely from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In these verses is contained for me the whole truth of the spinning wheel as an indispensable Sacrament for the India of to-day. If we will take care of to-day, God will take care of the morrow.

Work is more excellent than idleness

The body's life proceeds not, lacking work.

There is a task of holiness to do,

Unlike world-binding toil, which bindeth not

The faithful soul ; such earthly duty do

Free from desire, and thou shalt well perform

Thy heavenly purpose. Spake Prajapati

In the beginning, when all men were made,

And, with mankind, the sacrifice—"Do this !

Work ! Sacrifice ! Increase and multiply

With Sacrifice ! This shall be *Kamadhuk*,

Your 'Cow of plenty,' giving back her milk

Of all abundance. Worship the gods thereby ;

The gods shall yield ye grace. Those meats ye crave

The gods will grant to Labour, when it pays

Tithes in the altar-flame. But if one eats

Fruits of the earth, rendering to kindly heaven,

No gift of toil, that thief steals from this world.

Who eat of food after their sacrifice

Are quit of fault, but they that spread a feast

All for themselves, eat sin and drink of sin.

By food the living live ; food comes of rain,

And rain comes by the pious sacrifice,

And sacrifice is paid with tithes of toil ;

Thus action is of *Brahman*, who is One,

The only, All-pervading ; at all times

Present in sacrifice. He that abstains

To help the rolling wheels of this great world

Glutting his idle sense, lives a lost life,

Shameful and vain.

Work here undoubtedly refers to physical labour, and work by way of sacrifice can only be work to be done by all for the common benefit. Such work—such sacrifice can only be spinning. I do not wish to suggest that the author of the Divine Song had the spinning wheel in mind. He merely laid down a fundamental principle of conduct. And reading in and applying it to India, I can only think of spinning as the fittest and most acceptable sacrificial body labour. I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that, for, we should all do the labour that the poor must do and thus identify ourselves with them and through them with all mankind. I cannot imagine better worship of God than that in His name I should labour for the poor even as they do. The spinning-wheel spells a more equitable distribution of the riches of the earth.

*Young India* : October 20, 1921.

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## Yajna or Sacrifice

**W**E make frequent use of the word *yajna*. We have raised spinning to the rank of a daily *mahayajna* (primary sacrifice). It is therefore necessary to think out the various implications of the term *yajna*.

*Yajna* means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity but all life. Therefore, and also from the standpoint of *ahimsa*, it will not be a *yajna* to sacrifice lower animals even with a view to the service of humanity. It does not matter that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the *Vedas*. It is enough for us that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in *Vedic* scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of *Vedic* society, it can form no precedent for a votary of *ahimsa*.

Again, a primary sacrifice must be an act which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble. It will not therefore be *yajna*, much less a *mahayajna*, to wish or to do ill to anyone else, even in order to serve a so-called higher interest. And the *Gita* teaches, and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *yajna*, promotes bondage.

The world cannot subsist for a single moment without *yajna* in this sense, and therefore the *Gita*, after having dealt with true wisdom in the second chapter, takes up in the third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *yajna* came with the Creation itself. This body therefore has



been given us only in order that we may serve all Creation with it. And, therefore, says the *Gita*, he who eats without offering *yajna* eats stolen food. Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *yajna*. *Yajna* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus for ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bondsman receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the Universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore we may not blame the Master, if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be cherished or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is a natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realise our proper place in God's scheme. One does indeed need strong faith, if one would experience this supreme bliss. *Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God*,—this appears to be the commandment in all religions.

This need not frighten anyone. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one, who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognise the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously everyone of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness, but that of the world at large.

From *Yervada Mandir*.

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The greatest charity at the present moment that I can conceive for any Indian to do is to promote this *Khadi* work. Our rich friends are fond of giving free dinners to the so-called poor people. I have often questioned the virtue of giving these dinners. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that that gift only is a good

gift which is given to a worthy man. It would be right to feed the blind and the maimed and those who somehow or other cannot work for a living. But I make bold to say that if all of you conspiring together make a fund for feeding 50,000 villages in India, it would be a great thing.

*Young India* : October 6, 1927.

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I have heard much against it. But I know the time is near when the very thing which is being abused to day will be worshipped as *Sudarshna Chakra*. I am confident that if we do not take it up voluntarily, the force of circumstances will compel us. The study of Indian economics is the study of the spinning wheel. It is the *sine qua non* for the revival of our languishing village industries. I do not look upon hand spinning as an occupation but as a duty incumbent upon followers of all religious sects and denominations.

An American writer says that the future lies with nations that believe in manual labour. Nations are tired of the worship of lifeless machine multiplied *ad infinitum*. We are destroying the matchless living machines, *viz.*, our own bodies, by leaving them to rust and trying to substitute lifeless machinery for them. It is a law of God that the body must be fully worked and utilised. We dare not ignore it. The spinning-wheel is the auspicious symbol of *Sharir Yajna*—body labour. He who eats his food without offering this sacrifice steals it. By giving up this sacrifice we became traitors to the country and bang the door in the face of the Goddess of Fortune. The numerous men and women in India whose bodies are mere skeletons bear witness to this.

*Young India* : January 8, 1925.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### Result of Introspection

**W**HEN, in 1893, I came in close contact with Christian friends, I was a mere novice. They were trying hard to bring home to me, and make me accept, the message of Jesus, and I was a humble and respectful listener with an open mind. At that time I naturally studied Hinduism to the best of my ability and endeavoured to understand other religions.

In 1903 the position was somewhat changed. Theosophist friends certainly intended to draw me into their Society, but that was with a view to getting something from me as a Hindu. Theosophical literature is replete with Hindu influence, and so these friends expected that I should be very helpful to them. I explained that my Sanskrit study was not much to speak of, that I had not read the Hindu scriptures in the original, and that even my acquaintance with them through translations was of the slightest. But being as they were believers in *samskara*, (impressions of previous births) and *punarjanma* (rebirth), they assumed that I should be able to render at least some help. And so I felt like a Triton among the minnows. I started reading Swami Vivekananda's *Rajayoga* with some of these friends and M. N. Dvivedi's *Rajayoga* with others. I had to read Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* with one friend and the *Bhagavad Gita* with quite a number. We formed a sort of Seekers' Club where we had regular readings. I already had faith in the *Gita* which had a fascination for me. Now I realised the necessity of diving deeper into it. I had with me one or two translations, by means of which I tried to understand the original Sanskrit and decided to get by heart one or two verses every day. For the purpose I employed the time of my morning ablutions. This operation took me thirty-five minutes, fifteen minutes for the

tooth-brush and twenty for the bath. The first I used to do standing in the Western fashion. So on the wall opposite I stuck slips of paper on which were written the *Gita* verses and referred to them now and then to help my memory. This time was found sufficient for memorising the daily portion and recalling the verses already learnt. I remember having thus committed to memory thirteen chapters. But the memorising of the *Gita* had to give way to the increase of other work and the birth and nursing of *Satyagraha* which absorbed all my thinking time, as the latter may be said to be doing even now.

What effect this reading of the *Gita* had on the friends with whom I read it, only they can say, but for me the *Gita* became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. The words like *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *samabhava* (equability) gripped me. How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. What was the meaning of making no distinction between insulting, insolent, and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? And how was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not the wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to burn my boats, give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had. My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the maxims of Equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly in the light of the *Gita* teaching the implication of the word 'trustee.' My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. *I understood the Gita teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee, who though having control over great possessions regards not an iota of it as his own.* It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude. I then wrote to Revashankarbhai to allow the insurance policy to lapse.

and get whatever could be recovered, or else to regard the premiums, already paid, as lost, for I had *become convinced that God who created my wife and children as well as myself would take care of them.* To my brother who had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had always offered him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that hence forth he should expect nothing from me, for all future savings, if any, would be utilised for the benefit of the community.

I could not easily make my brother understand this. In stern language, he explained to me my duty towards him. I should not, he said, aspire to be wiser than our father. I must support the family as he did. I pointed out to him that I was doing exactly what our father had done. It only needed that the meaning of 'family' should be slightly widened and the wisdom of my step would become clear.

My brother gave me up, and practically stopped all communication with me. I was deeply distressed, but it would have been a greater distress to give up what I considered to be my duty, and I preferred the lesser. But that did not affect my devotion to my brother which remained as pure and great as ever. His excessive love for me was at the root of his misery. He did not so much want my money as that I should be well-behaved towards the family. Near the end of his life, however, he appreciated my view-point. When almost on his death-bed, he realised that my step had been right and he wrote me a most pathetic letter. He apologised to me, if indeed a father may apologise to his son. He commended his sons to my care, to be brought up as I thought fit, and expressed his impatience to meet me. He cabled to me that he would like to come to South Africa and I cabled in reply that he could. But that was not to be. His desire as regards his sons also could not be fulfilled. He died before he could start for South Africa. His sons had been brought up in the old atmosphere and they could not change their course of life. I could not draw them to me. It was not their fault. "Who can say thus far, no further, to the tide of his own nature?" *Who can erase the indelible impressions with which he is born? It is idle to expect one's children and wards necessarily to follow the same course of evolution as oneself.*

*This instance to some extent serves to show what a terrible responsibility it is to be a parent.*—"The Story of My Experiments with Truth."

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## Non-possession or Poverty

**N**ON-POSSESSION is allied to Non-stealing. A thing not originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property, if one possesses it without needing it. Possession implies provision for the future. A seeker after Truth, a follower of the law of love cannot hold anything against to-morrow: God never stores for the morrow; He never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment. If therefore we repose faith in His providence, we should rest assured, that He will give us every day our daily bread, meaning everything that we require. Saints and devotees, who have lived in such faith, have always derived a justification for it from their experience. Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives to man from day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attendant upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted; while millions are starved to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want, and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multimillionaire. The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to a universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed, and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. Perfect fulfilment of the ideal of Non-possession requires that man should, like the birds, have no roof over his head, no clothing and no stock of food for the morrow. He will indeed need his daily bread, but it will be God's business, and not his, to provide it. Only the fewest possible, if any at all, can reach this ideal. We ordinary seekers may not be repelled by the seeming impossibility. We must

keep the ideal constantly in view, and in the light thereof, critically examine our possessions, and try to reduce them. Civilisation, in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants. This alone promotes real happiness and contentment, and increases the capacity for service. Judging by this criterion, we find that in the *Ashram* we possess many things, the necessity for which cannot be proved, and we thus tempt our neighbours to thieve.

From the standpoint of pure Truth, the body too is a possession. It has been truly said that desire for enjoyment creates bodies for the soul. When this desire vanishes there remains no further need for the body, and man is free from the vicious cycle of births and deaths. The soul is omnipresent; why should she care to be confined within the cagelike body, or do evil and even kill for the sake of that cage? We thus arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purposes of service so long as it exists, so much so that service, and not bread, becomes with us the staff of life. We eat and drink, sleep and wake, for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness, and the beatific vision in the fullness of time. Let us all examine ourselves from this standpoint.

We should remember that Non-possession is a principle applicable to thoughts, as well as to things. One who fills his brain with useless knowledge violates that inestimable principle. Thoughts, which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way. In this connection we may consider the definition of knowledge contained in the 13th Chapter of the *Gita*. We are there told that humility (*amanitvam*), etc., constitute knowledge, and all the rest is ignorance. If this is true,—and there is no doubt that it is true,—much that we hug to-day as knowledge is ignorance pure and simple, and therefore only does us harm, instead of conferring any benefit. It makes the mind wander, and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in endless ramifications of evil. Needless to say, this is not a plea for inertia. Every moment of our life should be filled with mental or physical activity, but

that activity should be *sattvika*, tending to Truth. One who consecrated his life to service cannot be idle for a single moment. But one has to learn to distinguish between good activity and evil activity. This discernment goes naturally with a single-minded devotion to service.

*From Yervada Mandir.*

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## CHAPTER XIV

### ON THAT HALLOWED SPOT

#### Test of Faith

**T**HE month preceding the inauguration of the campaign of Civil Disobedience has been full of trials and tribulations for the members of the *Ashram*, and day in and day out Gandhiji has poured out his soul at the morning and evening prayers on that patch of ground which may yet be called by the "sacred name of '*Satyagrahashram*.' " The spot is exclusively used for prayers, and the idea behind confining the sacred name to that small area is that that, if any, is the spot where the inmates gather together for communion, having cast off, for the moment trammels of the flesh and in a spirit of complete submission to truth and non-violence, *Satyagraha*.

But even outside the prayer ground that pursuit of truth and non-violence in there, that striving after practising the teaching of the *Gita*, the verses of which we recite morning and evening, is there. But nothing had yet happened to test the genuineness of that striving. The test, however, came in the shape of the epidemic of small-pox which, in spite of utmost care and nursing bestowed on the patients, carried away three promising children of the *Ashram*. Mourning demonstrations of grief were out of the question but that was not enough. All, including the parents, were to go through the day's duties as though nothing had happened. And all stood the test well. No more than the minimum necessary went to the burning *ghat*, there was no break in the work allotted to the rest, and even the parents of the children did not miss their prayers or their

sacrificial spinning. They refused to make any distinction between that the world regards as an occasion of grief and an occasion of rejoicing. Within two days of the death of a boy came the day (previously fixed) of the wedding of a girl. It was gone through with the solemnity that a sacred rite requires, and Gandhiji spoke on the restraining quality of marriage with as much favour as on the benignant quality of death.

But the trial was perhaps greater for Gandhiji than for the inmates of the *Ashram*. He had to go through a heart-searching that others had no reason to go through. They had simply to refrain from giving way to grief. He had to cast the searchlight inward and examine every one of his actions and plans. Having been a staunch opponent of vaccination all his life, he would not persuade the inmates to get their children vaccinated. Of course, everyone was free to do so and was offered all facilities. There were protests from friends who implored him not to take the grave risk he was doing, and to make the inmates be vaccinated or re-vaccinated as the case might be. "How can I go back on the principles I have held dear all my life, when I find that it is these principles that are being put to the test?" he said at the prayer. "I have no doubt in my mind that vaccination is a filthy process, that it is harmful in the end and that it is little short of taking beef. I may be entirely mistaken. But holding the views that I do, how can I recant them? Because I see child after child passing away? No, not even if the whole of the *Ashram* were to be swept away, may I insist on vaccination and pocket my principle. What would my love of truth and my adherence to principle mean if they were to vanish at the slightest touch of reality?

"But God is putting me through a greater test. On the eve of what is to be the final test of our strength, God is warning me through the messenger of death. I have tried hydro-pathy and earth treatment with success in numerous cases. Never has the treatment failed as it seems to have done during the month. But does that mean that I must therefore lose faith in the treatment and faith in God? Even so my faith in the efficacy of non-violence may be put to severest test. I may have to see not three but hundreds and thousands

being done to death during the campaign I am about to launch. Shall my heart quail before that catastrophe, or will I persevere in my faith? No, I want you everyone to understand that this epidemic is not a scourge, but a trial and preparation, a tribulation, sent to steel our hearts and to chain us more strongly and firmly to faith in God. And would not my faith in *Gita* be a mockery if three deaths were to unhinge me? It is as clear to me as daylight that life and death are but phases of the same thing, the reverse and obverse, of the same coin. In fact tribulation and death seem to me, to present a phase far richer than happiness or life. What is life worth without trial and tribulation which are the salt of life? The history of mankind would have been a blank sheet without these individuals. What is *Ramayana* but a record of trials, privations and penances of Rama and Sita? The life of Rama, after the recovery of Sita, full of happiness as it was, does not occupy even a hundredth part of the epic. I want you all to treasure death and suffering more than life, and to appreciate their cleansing and purifying character."

*Young India* : March 12, 1930.

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## CHAPTER XV

### Crusade Against Non-co-operation

**I** HAVE most carefully read the manifesto addressed by Sir Narayan Chandavarkar and others dissuading the people from joining the Non-co-operation Movement. I had expected to find some solid argument against Non-co-operation, but to my great regret I have found in it nothing but distortion (no doubt unconscious) of the great religions and history. The manifesto says that *Non-co-operation is deprecated by the religious tenets and traditions of our motherland, nay, by all the religions that have saved and elevated the human race.* I venture to submit that the *Bhagavad Gita* is a gospel of Non-co-operation between the forces of darkness and those of light. If it is to be literally interpreted, Arjun representing a just cause was enjoined to engage in bloody warfare with the unjust Kauravas. Tulsidas advises the *Sant* (the good) to shun the *Asant* (the evil-doers). The *Zendavesta* represents a perpetual duel between Ormuzd and Ahriman, between whom there is no compromise. To say of the *Bible* that it taboos Non-co-operation is not to know Jesus, a prince among passive resisters, who uncompromisingly challenged the might of the Sadducees and the Pharisees and for the sake of truth did not hesitate to divide sons from the parents. And what did the Prophet of Islam do? He non-co-operated in Mecca in a most active manner so long as his life was not in danger and wiped the dust of Mecca off his feet when he found that he and his followers might have uselessly to perish, and fled to Medina and returned when he was strong enough to give battle to his opponents. The duty of non-co-operation with unjust men and kings is as strictly enjoined by all the religions as is the duty of co-ope-

ration with just men and kings. Indeed most of the scriptures of the world seem even to go beyond Non-co-operation and prefer violence to effeminate submission to a wrong. The Hindu religious tradition, of which the manifesto speaks, clearly proves the duty of Non-co-operation. Prahlad dissociated himself from his father, Meerabai from her husband, Bibhishan from his brutal brother.

The manifesto, speaking of the secular aspect, says "*The history of nations affords no instance to show that it (meaning Non-co-operation) has, when employed, succeeded and done good.*" One most recent instance of brilliant success of Non-co-operation is that of General Botha who boycotted Lord Milner's reformed councils and thereby procured a perfect constitution for his country. The Dukhobours of Russia offered Non-co-operation, and a handful though they were, their grievances so deeply moved the civilized world that Canada offered them a home where they form a prosperous community. In India, instances can be given by the dozen in which in little principalities the ryots when deeply grieved by their chiefs have cut off all connections with them and bent them to their will. I know of no instance in history where well-managed Non-co-operation has failed.

Hitherto I have given historical instances of bloodless Non-co-operation. I will not insult the intelligence of the reader by citing historical instances of Non-co-operation combined with violence, but I am free to confess that there are on records as many successes as failures in violent Non-co-operation. And it is because I know this fact that I have placed before the country a non-violence scheme in which, if at all worked satisfactorily, success is a certainty and in which non-response means no harm. For, if even one man non-co-operates, say by resigning some office, he has gained, not lost. That is its ethical or religious aspect. For its political result naturally it requires polymerous support. I fear therefore no disastrous result from Non-co-operation save for an outbreak of violence on the part of the people whether under provocation or otherwise. I would risk violence a thousand times than risk the emasculation of a whole race.

*Young India* : August 26, 1920.

## Religious Authority for Non-co-operation

**I**T is not without the greatest reluctance that I engage in a controversy with as learned a leader as Sir Narayan Chandavarker. But in view of the fact that I am the author of the Movement of Non-co-operation, it becomes my painful duty to state my views even though they are opposed to those of the leaders whom I took upon with respect. I have just read during my travels in Malabar Sir Narayan's rejoinder to my answer to the Bombay manifesto against Non-co-operation. I regret to have to say that the rejoinder leaves me unconvinced. He and I seem to read the teachings of the *Bible*, the *Gita* and the *Koran* from different standpoints, or we put different interpretations on them. We seem to understand the words *Ahimsa*, politics and religion differently. I shall try my best to make clear my meaning of the common terms and my reading of the different religions.

At the outset, let me assure Sir Narayan that I have not changed my views on *Ahimsa*. I still believe that man, not having been given the power of creation, does not possess the right of destroying the meanest creature that lives. The prerogative of destruction belongs solely to the Creator of all that lives. I accept the interpretation of *Ahimsa*, namely, that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *Ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically. Thus if my son lives a life of shame, I may not help him to do so by continuing to support him ; on the contrary, my love for him requires me to withdraw all support from him although it may mean even his death. And the same love imposes on me the obligation of welcoming him to my bosom when he repents. But I may not by physical force compel my son to become good. That, in my opinion, is the moral of the story of the Prodigal Son.

Non-co-operation is not a passive state, it is an intensely active state—more active than physical resistance or violence. Passive resistance is a misnomer. Non-co-operation in the sense used by me must be non-violent and therefore neither punitive nor vindictive nor based on malice, ill-will or hatred. It follows therefore that it would be sin for me to serve General Dyer and, co-operate with him to shoot innocent men. But it will be an exercise of forgiveness or love for me to nurse him back to life if he was suffering from a physical malady. I cannot use in this context the word co-operation as Sir Narayan would perhaps use it. I would co-operate a thousand times with this Government to wean it from its career of crime, but I will not for a single moment co-operate with it to continue that career. And I would be guilty of wrong-doing if I retained a title from it or “as service under it or supported its law courts or schools.” Better for me a beggar’s bowl than the richest possession from hands stained with the blood of the innocent of Jallianwala. Better by far a warrant of imprisonment than honeyed words from those who have wantonly wounded the religious sentiment of my seventy million brothers.

My reading of the *Gita* is diametrically opposed to Sir Narayan’s. I do not believe that the *Gita* teaches violence for doing good. It is pre-eminently a description of the duel that goes on in our own hearts. The divine author has used a historical incident for inculcating the lesson of doing one’s duty even at the peril of one’s life. It inculcates performance of duty irrespective of the consequences, for, we mortals, limited by our physical frames, are incapable of controlling actions save our own. The *Gita* distinguishes between the powers of light and darkness and demonstrates their incompatibility.

Jesus, in my humble opinion, was a prince among politicians. He did render unto Cæsar that which was Cæsar’s. He gave the devil his due. He ever shunned him and is reported never once to have yielded to his incantations. The politics of his time consisted in securing the welfare of the people by teaching them not to be seduced by the trinkets of the priests and the Pharisees. The latter then controlled and moulded the life of the people. To-day the system of govern-

ment is so devised as to affect every department of our life. It threatens our very existence. If therefore we want to conserve the welfare of the nation, we must religiously interest ourselves in the doings of the governors and exert a moral influence on them by insisting on their obeying the laws of morality. General Dyer did produce a "moral effect" by an act of butchery. Those who are engaged in forwarding the movement of Non-co-operation hope to produce a moral effect by a process of self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-purification. It surprises me that Sir Narayan should speak of General Dyer's massacre in the same breath as acts of Non-co-operation. I have done my best to understand his meaning, but I am sorry to confess that I have failed.

I consider that I would be less than truthful if I did not describe as satanic a government which has been guilty of fraud, murder, and wanton cruelty : which still remains unrepentant and resorts to untruth to cover its guilt. I really believe I am performing the office of a friend by denouncing in precise language the pretensions of a government which has nothing to commend itself to the people under its charge.

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*Young India* : Feb. 23, 1921



## CHAPTER XVI

### Ahimsa or Love

**A** *HIMSA* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *Ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by one's holding on to what the world needs. But the world needs even what we eat day by day. In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs, and who are hurt by our presence there. What should we do then? Should we commit suicide? Even that is no solution, if we believe, as we do, that so long as the spirit is attached to the flesh, on every destruction of the body it weaves for itself another. The body will cease to be only when we give up all attachment to it. This freedom from all attachment is the realisation of the God as Truth. Such realisation cannot be attained in a hurry. The body does not belong to us. While it lasts, we must use it as a trust handed over our charge. Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body. Realising the limitations of the flesh, we must day by day strive towards the ideal with what strength we have in us.

It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without *ahimsa* it is not possible to seek and find Truth. *Ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin—rather of a smooth, unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse and

which is the reverse ? Nevertheless *ahimsa* is the means ; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question. Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is being God Himself.

From *Tervada Mandir*.

## The Meaning of the Gita

**A** FRIEND puts forward the following poser :

The controversy about the teaching of the *Gita*—whether it is *Himsa* (violence) or *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) will, it seems, go on for a long time. It is one thing what meaning we read in the *Gita* or rather we want to read in the *Gita*, it is another what meaning is furnished by an unbiased reading of it. The question therefore does not present much difficulty to one who implicitly accepts *Ahimsa* as the eternal principle of life. He will say that the *Gita* is acceptable to him only if it teaches *Ahimsa*. A grand book like *Gita* could, for him, inculcate nothing grander than the eternal religious principle of *Ahimsa*. If it did not, it would cease to be his unerring guide. It would still be worthy of his high regard but not an infallible authority.

In the first chapter we find Arjuna laying down his weapons, under the influence of *Ahimsa*, and ready to die at the hands of the Kauravas. He conjures up a vision of the disaster and the sin involved *Himsa*. He is overcome with ennui and in fear and trembling exclaims :

“ *Oh what a mighty sin we are up to !*”

Shri Krishna catches him in that mood and tells him :

*“Enough of this high philosophy. No one kills or is killed. The soul is immortal and the body must perish. Fight then the fight that has come to thee as a matter of duty. Victory or defeat is no concern of thine. Acquit thyself of thy task.”*

In the eleventh chapter the Lord presents a panoramic vision of the Universe and says :

*“I am Kala, the destroyer of the worlds, the Ancient of Days ; I am here engaged in my task of destruction of the worlds. Kill thou those already killed by me. Give not thyself up to grief.*

*Himsa* and *Ahimsa* are equal before God. But for man what is God's message ? Is it this : ‘Fight ; for thou are sure to foil thy enemies in the field’ ? If the *Gita* teaches *Ahimsa*, the first and the eleventh chapters are not consistent with the rest ; at any rate do not support the *Ahimsa* theory. I wish you could find time to resolve my doubt.

The question put is eternal and everyone who has studied the *Gita* must needs find out his own solution. And, although I am going to offer mine, I know that ultimately one is guided not by the intellect but by the heart. The heart accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Argument follows conviction. Man often finds reason in support of whatever he does or wants to do.

I shall therefore appreciate the position of those who are unable to accept my interpretation of the *Gita*. All I need do is to indicate how I reached my meaning, and what canons of interpretation I have followed in arriving at it. Mine is but to fight for my meaning, no matter whether I win or lose.

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* was in 1889, when I was almost twenty. I had not then much of an inkling of the principle of *Ahimsa*. One of the lines of the Gujarati poet Shamal Bhatta had taught me the principle of winning even the enemy with love and that teaching had gone deep into me. But I had not deduced the eternal principle of Non-violence from it. It did not for instance cover all animal life. I had before this tasted meat whilst in India. I thought it a duty

to kill venomous reptiles like the snake. It is my conviction to-day that even venomous creatures may not be killed by a believer in *Ahimsa*. I believed in those days in preparing ourselves for a fight with the English. I often repeated a Gujarati poet's famous doggerel : '*What wonder if Britain rules !*' etc. My meat-eating was as a first step to qualify myself for the fight with the English. Such was my position before I proceeded to England, and there I escaped meat-eating, etc., because of my determination to follow unto death the promises I had given to my mother. My love for truth has saved me from many a pitfall.

Now whilst in England my contact with two English friends made me read the *Gita*. I say 'made me read,' because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But when these two friends asked me to read the *Gita* with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride I think was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand all the verses of the *Gita* unaided. The friends, of course, were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the *Gita*. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the second chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they teach are the 'eternal verities.' There is reasoning in them but they represent realised knowledge.

I have since read many translations and many commentaries, have argued and reasoned to my heart's content but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*. I would even advise rejection of the verses that may seem to be in conflict with them. But a humble student need reject nothing. He will simply say : 'It is the limitation of my own intellect that I cannot resolve this inconsistency. I might be able to do so in the time to come.' That is how he will plead with himself and with others.

A prayerful study and experience are essential for a

correct interpretation of the scriptures. The injunction that a *Shudra* may not study the scriptures is not entirely without meaning. A *Shudra* means a spiritually uncultured, ignorant man. He is more likely than not to misinterpret the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Everyone cannot solve an algebrical equation. Some preliminary study is a *sine qua non*. How ill would the grand truth 'I am *Brahman*' lie in the mouth of a man steeped in sin! To what ignoble purposes would he turn it! What a distortion it would suffer at his hands!

A man therefore who would interpret the scriptures must have the spiritual discipline. He must practice the *Tamas* and *Niyamas*—the eternal guides of conduct. A superficial practice thereof is useless. The *Shastras* have enjoined the necessity of a *Guru*. But a *Guru* being rare in these days, a study of modern books inculcating *Bhakti* has been suggested by the sages. Those who are lacking in *Bhakti*, lacking in faith, are ill-qualified to interpret scriptures. The learned may draw an elaborately learned interpretation out of them, but that will not be true interpretation. Only the experienced will arrive at the true interpretation of the scriptures.

But even for the inexperienced there are certain canons. That interpretation is not true which conflicts with Truth. To one who doubts even Truth, the scriptures have no meaning. No one can contend with him. There is danger for the man who has failed to find *Ahimsa* in the scriptures, but he is not doomed. Truth—*Sat*—is positive; Non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, Non-violence negatives the fact. And yet Non-violence is the highest religion. Truth is self-evident; Non-violence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but as it is not self-evident, a man may seek to interpret the *Shashtra* without accepting it. But this acceptance of Truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of Non-violence.

Renunciation of the flesh is essential for realising Truth. The sage who realised Truth found Non-violence out of the violence raging all about him and said: 'Violence is unreal; Non-violence is real. Realisation of Truth is impossible without Non-violence. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *Asetya* (non-stealing), *Aparigraha* (non-possession) are means to achieve *Ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the soul

of truth. Man is mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realise all this in his search for Truth and he will have no difficulty in the interpretation of the *Shashtra*.

Another canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter but to examine the spirit. Tulsidas's *Ramayana* is a noble book because it is informed with the spirit of purity, pity and piety. There is verse in it which brackets drums, *shudras*, fools and women together as fit to be beaten. A man who cites that verse to beat his wife is doomed to perdition. Rama did not only not beat his wife, but never even sought to displease her. Tulsidas simply inserted in his poem a proverb current in his days, little dreaming that there would be brutes justifying beating of their wives on the authority of the verse. But assuming that Tulsidas himself followed a custom which was prevalent in his days and beat his wife; what then? The beating was still wrong. But the *Ramayana* was not written to justify beating of their wives by their husbands. It was written to depict Rama, the perfect man, and Sita, the ideal wife, and Bharat the ideal of a devoted brother. Any justification incidentally met with therein of vicious customs should therefore be rejected. Tulsidas did not write his priceless epic to teach geography, and any wrong geography that we happen to come across in *Ramayana* should be summarily rejected.

Let us examine the *Gita* in the light of these observations. Self-realisation and its means is the theme of the *Gita*, the fight between two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might if you like say that the poet himself was not against war or violence, and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of a war into service. But a reading of the *Mahabharata* has given me an altogether different impress. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of war by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to? And where are the Yadavas to-day?

Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject-matter of the epic, it is quite

wrong to emphasise those aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of Non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the frame work of violence.

The poet when he writes is not conscious of all the interpretations his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The Truth that he reaches in the highest flights of his fancy is often not to be met with in his life. The life story of many a poet thus belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the *Gita* is not *Himsa* but *Ahimsa* is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in the second chapter and summarised in the concluding (18th) chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsa* is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the *Gita* strives to carry us to a state beyond *Sattwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger every time he drew the bow to the end of his ear.

It was not in a spirit of *Ahimsa* that Arjuna refused to go to battle. He had fought many a battle before. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say he would kill no one, even if he regarded him as wicked. Sri Krishna knows everyone's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He therefore told him: '*Thou hast already done the killing. Thou canst not all at once argue thyself into Non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun.*' If a passenger going in a Scotch Express gets suddenly sick of travelling and jumps out of it, he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other advice. But to say that the *Gita* teaches violence or justifies war, because advice to kill was given on a particular occasion, is as wrong as to say that *Himsa* is the law of life, because a certain amount of it is inevitable in daily life. To one who reads the spirit of the *Gita*, it teaches the secret of Non-violence, the secret of realising the self

through the physical body.

And who are Dhritrashtra and Yudhishthira, and Arjuna ? Who is Krishna ? Were they all historical characters ? And does the *Gita* describe them as such ? Is it true that Arjuna suddenly stops in the midst of the fight and puts the question to Krishna, and Krishna repeats the whole of the *Gita* before him ? And which is that *Gita*—the *Gita* that Arjuna forgot after having exclaimed that his infatuation was gone and which he requested Krishna to sing again, but which he could not, and which therefore he gave in the form *Anugita* ?

I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the poet seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch the heart needs the winding of purity, or the Dweller ceases to speak.

Not that actual physical battle is out of the question. To those who are innocent of Non-violence, the *Gita* does not teach a lesson of despair. He who fears, who saves his skin, who yields to his passions, must fight the physical battle whether he will or not ; but that is not his *Dharma*. *Dharma* is one and one only. *Ahimsa* means *Moksha* and *Moksha* is the realisation of Truth. There is no room here for cowardice. *Himsa* will go on eternally in this strange world. The *Gita* shows the way out of it. But it also shows that escape out of cowardice and despair is not the way. Better far than cowardice killing and being killed in battle.

If the meaning of the verses quoted by the correspondent is not still clear, I must confess my inability to make it so. Is it agreed that the Almighty God is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer and ought to be such ? And if He creates, He has undoubtedly the right to destroy. And yet He does not destroy because He does not create. His law is that whatever is born must die, and in that lies His mercy. His laws are immutable. Where should we all be if He changed them capriciously ?

*Young India* : November 12, 1925.



## My Friend the Revolutionary

A revolutionary puts the following questions :

Q. One of your objections against the revolutionaries is that their movement is not mass movement, consequently the mass at large will be very little benefited by the revolution, for which we are preparing. That is indirectly saying that we shall be most benefited by it. Is it really what you mean to say? Do you believe that those persons who are ever ready to die for their country—those mad-lovers of their country—I mean the revolutionaries of India in whom the spirit of *Nishikama Karma* reigns, will betray their motherland and secure privileges for a life—this trifling life? It is true that we will not drag the mass just now in the field of action, because we know that it is weak, but when the preparation is complete we shall call them into the open field. We profess to understand the present Indian psychology fully well, because we daily get the chance of weighing our brethren along with ourselves. We know that the mass of India is after all Indian, it is not weak by itself but there is want of efficient leaders: so when we have begot the number of leaders required by constant propaganda and preaching, and the arms, we shall not shrink from calling, and if necessary, dragging the mass in the open field to prove that they are the descendants of Shivaji, Ranjit, Pratap and Govind Singh. Besides we have been constantly preaching that the mass is not for the revolution but the revolution is for the mass. Is it sufficient to remove your prejudice in this connection?

A. I neither say nor imply that the revolutionary benefits the masses. On the contrary, and as a rule, the revolutionary never benefits in the ordinary sense of the word. If the revolutionaries succeed in attracting, not 'dragging', the masses to them, they will find that the murderous campaign is totally unnecessary. It sounds very pleasant and exciting to talk of 'the descendants of Shivaji, Ranjit, Pratap and

Govind Singh'. But is it true? Are we all descendants of these heroes in the sense in which the writer understands it? We are their countrymen, but their descendants are the military classes. We may in future be able to obliterate caste, but to-day it persists and therefore the claim put up by the writer cannot in my opinion be sustained.

- Q. Last of all, I shall ask you to answer these questions: Was Guru Govind Singh a misguided patriot because he believed in warfare for noble cause? What will you like to say about Washington, Garibaldi and Lenin? What do you think of Kamal Pasha and de Valera? Would you like to call Shivaji and Pratap, well-meaning and sacrificing physicians who prescribed arsenic when they should have given fresh grapejuice? Will you like to call Krishna Europeanised because he believed also in the *vinasha of dushkrītas*?

A. This is a hard or rather awkward question. But I dare not shrink it. In the first instance Guru Govind Singh and the others whose names are mentioned did not believe in secret murder. In the second, these patriots knew their work and their men, whereas the modern Indian revolutionary does not know his work. He has not the men, he has not the atmosphere, that the patriots mentioned had. Though my views are derived from my theory of life I have not put them before the nation on that ground. I have based my opposition to the revolutionaries on the sole ground of expedience. Therefore, to compare their activities with those of Guru Govind Singh or Washington or Garibaldi or Lenin would be most misleading and dangerous. But by test of the theory of non-violence I do not hesitate to say that it is highly likely that had I lived as their contemporary and in the respective countries I would have called everyone of them a misguided patriot even though a successful and brave warrior. As it is, I must not judge them. I disbelieve history so far as details of acts of heroes are concerned. I accept broad facts of history and draw my own lessons for my conduct. I do not want to repeat it in so far as the broad facts contradict the highest laws of life. But I positively refuse to judge men from the scanty material furnished to us by history. *De mortuis nil*

*nisi bonum.* Kamal Pasha and de Valera too I cannot judge. But for me as a believer in non-violence out and out they cannot be my guides in life in so far as their faith in war is concerned. I believe in Krishna perhaps more than the writer. But my Krishna is the Lord of the Universe, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of us all. He may destroy because He creates. But I must not be drawn into a philosophical or religious argument with my friends. I have not the qualifications for teaching my philosophy of life.' I have barely qualifications for practising the philosophy I believe. I am but a poor struggling soul yearning to be wholly good—wholly truthful and wholly non-violent in thought, word and deed, but ever failing to reach the ideal which I know to be true. I admit, and assure my revolutionary friends, it is a painful climb but the pain of it is a positive pleasure for me. Each step upward makes me feel stronger and fit for the next. But all that pain and the pleasure are for me. The revolutionaries are at liberty to reject the whole of my philosophy. To them I merely present my own experience as a co-worker in the same cause even as I have successfully presented them to the Ali Brothers and many other friends. They can and do applaud whole-heartedly the action of Mustfa Kamal Pasha and possibly de Valera and Lenin. But they realise with me that India is not like Turkey or Ireland or Russia and that revolutionary activity is suicidal at this stage of the country's life at any rate, if not for all time in a country so vast, so hopelessly divided and with the masses so deeply sunk in pauperism and so fearfully terror-struck.

*Young India* : April 9, 1925.

## Sikhism

**D**URING his visit to Patna for the A. I. C. C. Sardar Mangal Singh drew my attention to an article in *Young India* entitled 'My Friend the Revolutionary' in the issue dated 9th April last. He told me that many Sikh friends were offended, because they thought I had described Guru Govind Singh as a misguided patriot, whereas I had glorified Krishna. The

Sardarji asked me take an early opportunity of explaining what I meant by the passages he drew my attention to. The careful reader will note that my language is most guarded. I have made no positive assertion. All that I have said is that believing every statement made about the heroes mentioned, including Guru Govind Singh to be true, had I lived as their contemporary I would have called every one of them a misguided patriot. But in the very next sentence, I have hastened to add that I must not judge them and that I disbelieve history as far as the details of the acts of the heroes are concerned. My belief about the Sikh Gurus is that they were all deeply religious teachers and reformers, that they were all Hindus and that Guru Govind Singh was one of the greatest defenders of Hinduism. I believe too that he drew the sword in its defence. But I cannot judge his actions, nor can I use him as my model so far as his resort to the sword is concerned. What I would have done, had I lived in his times and held the same views that I hold now I do not know. Such speculation I regard as perfect waste of time. I do not regard Sikhism as a religion distinct from Hinduism. I regard it as part of Hinduism and the deformation in the same sense that Vaishnavism is. I read in the Yeravda prison all the writings that I could lay my hands upon regarding the Sikhs. I read portions of *Granth Saheb*. Its deeply spiritual and moral tone I found to be uplifting. In the collection of hymns we have at the *Ashram*, we have some of Guru Nanak's also. At the same time I do not quarrel with the Sikhs for considering, if they wish, Sikhism as totally distinct from Hinduism. And when during my first visit to the Punjab a few Sikh friends told me that my reference to Sikhism as part of Hinduism displeased them, I ceased to refer to it as such. But the Sikh friends will pardon me for avowing my belief when I am asked to express my opinion about Sikhism.

Now about Krishna. Whilst I have dealt with the Gurus as a historical personages about whose existence we have trustworthy records, I have no knowledge that the Krishna of *Mahabharata* ever lived. My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna

whom non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the *Gita* and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the *Mahabharata* is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the *Mahabharata* is authentic and that the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu-fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God-incarnate. But to me the *Mahabharata* is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves, given so vividly as to make us think for the time being that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the *Mahabharata* as we have it now as a faulty copy of the original. On the contrary I consider that it has undergone many amendments.

*Young India* : October 1, 1925.

## On the Verge of It

**A** CORRESPONDENT who described himself as 'I am not a revolutionary, but I am on the verge of being a revolutionary' put the following questions :

- Q** What is more inhuman and terrible, rather what is more violent, to let 33 millions suffer, stagnate and perish, or a few thousand be killed? What would you prefer to see, the slow death of a mass of 33 millions through sheer degeneration, or killing of a few hundred of people? This certainly is to be proved that the killing of a few hundred will stop the degeneration of 33 millions. But then it is a matter of detail and not principle. It may be later on discussed whether it is expedient or not. But if it is proved that by killing a few hundred we can put a stop to the degeneration of 33 millions, will you object to violence on principle?

There is no principle worth the name if it is not wholly good. I swear by non-violence because I know that it alone conduces to the highest good of mankind, not merely in the next world but in this also ; I object to violence because, when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary ; the evil it does is permanent. I do not believe that this killing of even every Englishman can do the slightest good to India. The millions will be just as badly off as they are to-day, if someone made it possible to kill off every Englishman to-morrow. The responsibility is more ours than that of the English for the present state of things. The English will be powerless to do evil if we will but do good. Hence my incessant emphasis on reform from within.

But before the revolution I have urged non-violence not on the highest ground of morality but on the lower ground of expedience. I contended that the revolutionary method cannot succeed in India. If an open warfare were a possibility, I may concede that we may tread the path of violence that the other countries have and at least evolve the qualities that bravery on the battlefield brings forth. But attainment of *Swaraj* through warfare I hold to be an impossibility for any time that we can foresee. Warfare may give us another rule for the English rule but not self-rule in terms of the masses. The pilgrimage to *Swaraj* is a painful climb. It requires attention to details. It means vast organising ability, it means penetration into the villages solely for the service of the villagers. — In other words it means national education, i.e., education of the masses. It means an awakening of national consciousness among the masses. It will not spring like the magician's mango. It will grow almost unperceived like the banyan tree. A bloody revolution will never perform the trick. Haste here is most certainly waste. The revolution of the spinning wheel is the quickest revolution conceivable.

Q. Is not all logic and reason discarded where vital interests of life are concerned ? Is it not a fact that a few selfish, tyrant and obdurate men may, as they do, refuse to listen to reason and continue to rule,

tyrannise and do injustice to a mass of people ? Lord Krishna failed to bring about a settlement peacefully between the obdurate Kauravas and Pandavas. *Mahabharata* may be a fiction. Poor Krishna may be less spiritual. But even you failed to persuade your Judge to resign from his post and not convict you, whom even he, as everybody else, regarded innocent. How far can persuasion through self-sacrifice be successful in such cases ?

It is sad but true that where so-called vital interests are concerned, logic and reason are thrown to the wind. Tyrants are, indeed obdurate. The English tyrant is obduracy personified. But he is a multi-headed monster. He refuses to be killed. He cannot be paid in his own coin, for he has left none for us to pay him with. I have a coin that is not cast in his mint and he cannot steal it. It is superior to any he has yet produced. It is non-violence ; and the symbol of it is the spinning-wheel. I have, therefore, presented it to the country with the fullest confidence. Krishna failed to do nothing he wished to do, so says the author of the *Mahabharata*. He was omnipotent. It is futile to drag Krishna from his heights. If he has to be judged as a mere mortal, I fear he will fare badly and will have to take a back seat. *Mahabharata* is neither fiction nor history commonly so-called. It is the history of the human soul in which God as Krishna is the chief actor. There are many things in that poem that my poor understanding cannot fathom. There are in it many things which are obvious interpolations. It is not a treasure chest. It is a mine which needs to be explored which needs to be dug deep and from which diamonds have to be extracted after removing much foreign matter. Therefore, I would urge my friends the full-fledged revolutionaries, or those in the making, or on the verge of being such, to keep their feet firm on Mother Earth and not scale the Himalayan heights to which the poet took Arjuna and his other heroes. Anyway, I must respectfully refuse even to attempt the ascent. The plains of Hindustan are good enough for me.

To descend to the plains then, let the questioner understand that I had not gone to the court to persuade the judge of my

innocence. But, on the contrary, I went there to plead fully guilty and ask for the highest penalty. For the breach by me of the man-made law was deliberate. The judge did not, could not, believe me to be innocent. There was not much sacrifice in undergoing the imprisonment. True sacrifice is made of sterner stuff. Let my friend understand the implications of non-violence. It is a process of conversion, I am convinced. I must be pardoned for saying it that my out and out non-violence has converted many more Englishmen than any amount of threats and deeds of violence. I know that when conscious non-violence becomes general in India, *Swaraj* will not be far.

*Young India* : May 21, 1925.

## God of Love, Not War

**T**HE *Statesman* of Delhi has devoted four articles to an unmeasured condemnation of the no-war movement led by Canon Sheppard and other earnest Christians in England. The paper has dragged into its support the authority of the *Bhagavad Gita* in these words :

Indeed the true but difficult teaching of Christianity seems to be that society must fight its enemies but love them.

Such, too,—will Mr. Gandhi please note—is the clear teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna tells Arjuna that victory also goes to him who fights with complete fearlessness and is utterly devoid of hatred. Indeed on the highest plane the argument between the conscientious objector and the kingly warrior is for ever settled in the second book of that great classic. We have little space to quote and the whole poem deserves to be read not once but many times.

The writer of the articles perhaps does not know that the terrorist has also used in his defence the very verses quoted by him. But the fact is that a dispassionate reading of the *Bhagavad*



*Gita* has revealed to me a meaning wholly contrary to the one given to it by the *Statesman* writer. He has forgotten that Arjuna was no conscientious objector in the sense the Western war-resisters are. Arjuna believed in war. He had fought the Kaurava hosts many times before. But he was un-nerved when the two armies were drawn up in the battle array and when he suddenly realised that he had to fight his nearest kinsmen and revered teachers. It was not love of man or the hatred of war that had actuated the questioner. Krishna could give no other answer than he did. The immortal author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is one—no doubt the brightest—of the many gems contained in that literary mine, has shown to the world the futility of war by giving the victors an empty glory leaving but seven victors alive out of millions said to have been engaged in the fight in which unnamable atrocities were used on either side. But the *Mahabharata* had a better message even than the demonstration of war as a delusion and a folly. It is the spiritual history of man considered as an immortal being and has used with a magnifying lens a historical episode considered in his times of moment for the tiny world round him, but in terms of present day values of no significance. In those days the globe had not shrunk to a pinhead as it has to-day on which the slightest movement on one spot affects the whole. The *Mahabharata* depicts for all time the eternal struggle that goes on daily between the forces of good and evil in the human breast and in which though good is ever victorious, evil does put up a brave show and baffles even the keenest conscience. It shows also the only way to right action.

But whatever the true message of the *Bhagavad Gita* may be, what matters to the leaders of the peace movement is not what the *Gita* says but what the *Bible*, which is their spiritual dictionary, says and then too not what meaning the Church authorities give to it, but what meaning a prayerful reading of it yields to the reader. What matters most of all is the objector's knowledge of the implications of the law of love or *Ahimsa* inadequately rendered in English as non-violence. The articles of the *Statesman* are perhaps a fair challenge to the objectors. I am sorry I do not know enough of the movement to give a definite opinion. My opinion need have no weight whatsoever with the

objectors. But it has, inasmuch as I know intimately, some of them who even corresponded with me. And now they have gone a step further in that they have adopted almost as their textbook Mr. Richard Gregg's book called *The Power of Non-Violence* which is claimed by its author to be a Western interpretation of what non-violence as I interpret it stands for. It may not therefore be presumptuous on my part, if I set down without argument the implications, and conditions of success of non-violence. Here they are :

(1) Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than, and superior to, brute force.

(2) In the last resort it does not avail to those who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love.

(3) Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove a better bulwark than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-violence in the very nature of things is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.

(4) Individuals or nations who would practise non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to the last man) their all except honour. It is therefore inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, *i.e.*, modern imperialism, which is frankly based on force for its defence.

(5) Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all—children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.

(6) It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals it is not for the masses of mankind.

*Harijan* : September 5, 1936.

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## The Law of Our Being

THE *Statesman* has devoted a reasoned article to the argument advanced by me in reply to its criticism of Canon Sheppard's war against war. In that article a very clever attempt has been made to dispute the whole of the position taken up by me.

The writer says that whilst the *Bhagavad Gita* assists him, it does not assist the terrorist. Once you admit the lawfulness of the use of physical force for purposes other than the benefit of the person against whom it is used, as in the case of a surgeon against his patient, you cannot draw an arbitrary line of distinction. The *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is only a tiny chapter, describes in gruesome detail a mighty slaughter of the innocents which, but for our recent experiences of our civilised war, would be considered unbelievable in actual practice. The grim fact is that the terrorists have in absolute honesty, earnestness and with cogency used the *Gita*, which some of them know by heart, in defence of their doctrine and policy. Only they have no answer to my interpretation of the *Gita*, except to say that mine is wrong and theirs is right. Time alone will show whose is right. The *Gita* is not theoretical treatise. It is a living but silent guide whose directions one has to understand by patient striving.

The *Statesman* writer next likens Canon Sheppard's position to that of Arjuna. Surely this is a faulty analogy, hastily drawn. Arjun was the Commander-in-Chief of the Pandava forces. He became suddenly paralysed when he contemplated the awful scene before him. As General he knew exactly what he had to do. He knew that he had to war against his cousins. His paralysis was due to momentary weakness. He could not have given up the task before him without creating the utmost confusion and disorder, and bringing disgrace on himself and his innumerable friends and followers. He was bound to engage himself and his followers in the terrible slaughter for which he had trained himself and them. It is profitless to conjecture what would have happened if non-violence in thought, word

and deed had suddenly but really possessed him.

That rich possession, let us hope, has come to Dick Sheppard and his companions. Anyway, so far as I know, his position is wholly different from Arjuna's. He is no general of an army drawn up in battle array. He makes no distinction between kinsmen and others. For him man is man, no matter where he is born or what his skin is, or what he calls himself. After having prayerfully searched through the book which for him is the Book of Life, he has been driven to the conclusion that he may not hurt his fellowmen for gain for himself or his country, and that therefore he must himself abstain from participation, direct or indirect, in war. He naturally takes the next step of preaching to his neighbours the doctrine of peace or love and good-will towards men without exception. This is a position which Arjuna never took up. But the *Statesman* writer has many strings to his bow. And the strongest is his denial of non-violence or love as the law of the human race. If love or non-violence be not the law of our being, the whole of my argument falls to pieces, and there is no escape from the periodical recrudescence of war, each succeeding one outdoing the preceding one in ferocity. I cannot undertake, and least of all through a newspaper article written during moments snatched from the daily routine, to prove that love is the source and end of life. But I venture to make some relevant suggestions which may pave the way for an understanding of the Law. All the teachers that ever lived have preached that law with more or less vigour. If Love was not the law of life, Life would not have persisted in the midst of death. Life is a perpetual triumph over the grave. If there is a fundamental distinction between man and beast, it is the former's progressive recognition of the law and its application in practice to his own personal life. All the saints of the world, ancient and modern, were each according to his light and capacity a living illustration of that supreme Law of our being. That the brute in us seems so often to gain an easy triumph is true enough. That, however, does not disprove the law. It shows the difficulty of practice. How should it be otherwise with a law which is as high as Truth itself? When the practice of the law becomes universal, God will reign.

on earth as He does in Heaven. I need not be reminded that earth and heaven are in us. We know the earth, we are strangers to the Heaven within us. If it is allowed that for some the practice of love is possible, it is arrogance not to allow even the possibility of its practice in all the others. Not very remote ancestors of ours indulged in cannibalism and many other practices which we would to-day call loathsome. No doubt in those days too there were Dick Sheppards who must have been laughed at and possibly pilloried for preaching the (to them) strange doctrine of refusing to eat fellowmen. Modern science is replete with illustrations of the seemingly impossible having become possible within living memory. But the victories of physical science would be nothing against the victory of the science of life which is summed up in Love which is the Law of our Being. I know that it cannot be proved by argument. It shall be proved by persons living it in their lives in utter disregard of consequence to themselves. There is no real gain without sacrifice. And since demonstration of the Law of Love is the reallest gain, sacrifice too must be the greatest required.

The rest of the argument advanced by the *statesman* writer in refutation of mine needs no answer, if the Law is recognized. His argument is valid if the Law is denied or doubted.

One point may, however, be dealt with in passing. The writer seems to poohpoo the idea of honour derived from individual and national gain. He says : *What is this honour that would be left to a nation that voluntarily destroy'd itself?* There is no question for one of self-destruction, voluntary or otherwise. But there is of a nation *allowing itself to be destroyed* for the sake of deserving its honour, as would be a case, say, if Indians died to the man, without lifting a finger, in their determination not to surrender to the will of an invading host. A woman defends her own honour and that of her sex, when she non-violently refuses to the point of death the advances of a rake. Young Prahlad non-violently risked his life to defend his honour, which consisted in his persistence in declaring his belief in God. Jesus defended his honour and that of man when he preferred the death of a felon to the denial of his faith.

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*Harijan* : Sept. 26, 1936.

## The Teaching of Hinduism

**R**EFERRING to my recent articles on the English Peace Movement led by Canon Sheppard, a friend writes :

I hold the view that independently of the context of the *Gita* and the preliminary conversation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna, Hinduism does not stand decisively for non-violence in regard to organised invasion. It would be straining too much to interpret all our best scriptures in this way. Hinduism no doubt holds the spirit of compassion and love as the very highest duty for man. But it does not preach what you or the pacifists preach, and it is no good straining everything into an allegory for this object.

I have admitted in my introduction to the *Gita* known as *Anasakti Yoga* that it is not a treatise on non-violence nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism as it is practised to-day, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the *Gita* and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the *Quran* or the *Bible*. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The *Gita* itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *Karma*, *Sannyasa*, *Rajna*, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the *Gita* has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the *Gita* put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the *Gita*, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical, I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors,

read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the *Gita* is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Anyway I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism on the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Upanishadas*, etc.

Harijan : October 3, 1936.

## The Central Teaching of the Gita

Q. Is the central teaching of the *Gita* selfless action or non-violence ?

A. I have no doubt that it is *anasakti*—selfless action. Indeed, I have called my little translation of the *Gita* *Anasakti Yoga*. And *Anasakti* transcends *ahimsa*. He who would be *anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary ; it is included in *anasakti*, it does not go beyond it.

Q. Then does the *Gita* teach *himsa* and *ahimsa* both ?

A. I do not read that meaning in the *Gita*. It is quite likely that the author did not write it to inculcate *ahimsa*, but as a commentator draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text ; even so I interpret the *Gita* to mean that, if its central theme is *anasakti* it also teaches *ahimsa*. Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise *ahimsa*. In the life beyond there is no *himsa* or *ahimsa*.

Q. But Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of *ahimsa*. For Arjun utters this pacifist resolve :

*Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,  
To face them weaponless, and bare my breast  
To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow.*

And Lord Krishna teaches him to answer "blow for blow."

A. There I join issue with you. Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday,' says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the slightest compunction. Even to-day you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your own kith and kin !' The question before him was not of non-violence, but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest.

M.D.

*Harijan* : September 1, 1940.

## Non-violent Army

Q. We cannot visualise how you will stand non-violently against a foreign invasion ?

A. I cannot draw the whole picture to you because we have no past experience to fall back upon and there is no reality facing us to-day. We have got the Government army manned by the Sikhs, Pathans and Gurkhas. What I can conceive is this that with my non-violent army of say, two thousand people I should put myself between the two contending armies. But this, I know, is no answer. I can only say that we shall be able to reduce the invader's violence to a minimum. The general of a non-violent army has got to have greater presence of mind than that of a violent army, and God would bless him with the necessary resourcefulness to meet situations as they arise.

Shri Kher now raised a philosophical question. "The world," he said, "is made up of pairs of opposites. Where there is fear, there is courage too. When we walk on the edge of



a precipice we walk warily, for we have fear. Fear is not a thing to despise. Will your non-violent army be above these pairs of opposites ?

"No," said Gandhiji, replying in the same philosophical terminology. "No, for the simple reason that my army will represent one of the pair—*Ahimsa*—out of the pair of *Himsa* and *Ahimsa*. Neither I nor my army is above the pair of opposites. The state of the *gunatita*, in the language of the *Gita*, rises above *Himsa* and *Ahimsa* both. Fear has its use, but cowardice has none. I may not put my finger into the jaws of a snake, but the very sight of the snake need not strike terror into me. The trouble is that we often die many times before death overtakes us.

"But let me explain what my army will be like. They need not and will not have the resourcefulness or understanding of a general, but they will have a perfect sense of discipline to carry out faithfully his orders. The general should have the quality which commands the unquestioning obedience of the army, and he will expect of them nothing more than this obedience. The Dandi March was entirely my conception. Pandit Motilalji first laughed at it, he thought it to be a quixotic adventure, and Jamnalalji suggested instead a march on the Viceregal House. But I could not think of anything but the Salt March as I had to think in terms of millions of our countrymen. It was a conception that God gave me. Pandit Motilalji argued for some time, and then he said he must not argue as after all I was the general, and he must have faith in me. Later when he saw me in Jambusar, he was completely converted, for he saw with his own eyes the awakening that had come over the masses. And it was an almost magical awakening. Where in history shall we find parallel of the cool courage that our women displayed in such large numbers ?

"And yet none of the thousands who took part in the movement were above average. They were erring, sinning mortals. God has a way of making use of the most fragile instruments and remaining Himself untouched by everything ; only He is *gunatita*.

“And then, what after all is the army that wins? You know Rama's reply to Vibhishana when the latter wondered how Rama would be able to conquer the foe like Ravana, when he had no chariot, no armour, nor any shoes to his feet? Rama says :—

‘The chariot, my dear Vibhishana, that wins the victory for Rama is of a different sort from the usual one, manliness and courage are its wheels, unflinching truth and character its banners and standards; strength, discrimination, self-restraint and benevolence its horses, with forgiveness, mercy, equanimity their reins; prayer to God is that conqueror's unerring charioteer, dispassion his shield, contentment his sword, charity his axe, intellect his spear, and perfect science his stout bow. His pure and unwavering mind stands for a quiver, his mental quietude and his practice of *yama* and *niyama* stand for the sheaf of arrows, and the homage he pays to *Brahmans* and his *Guru* is his impenetrable armour. There is no other equipment for victory comparable to this; and my dear friend, there is no enemy who can conquer the man who takes his stand on the chariot of *dharma*. He who has a powerful chariot like this is a warrior who can conquer even that great and invincible enemy—the world. Hearken upto me and fear not.’

“That is the equipment,” added Gandhiji, “that can lead us to victory. I have not retired from the world nor do I mean to. I am no recluse. I am content to do what little work I can in Sevagram and give what guidance I can to those that come to me. What we need is faith. And what is there to be lost in following the right path? The worst that can happen to us is that we shall be crushed. Better to be crushed than to be vanquished. But if we had to equip ourselves violently, I should be at my wit's end. I cannot even think out an armament plan, much less work it. On the other hand, my non-violent plan is incredibly simpler and easier, and with God as our Commander and Infallible Guide where is there cause for any fear?”

M. D.

*Harijan* : August 25, 1940.

## Farewell

**B**UT the time has now come to bring these chapters to a close.

My life from this point onward has been so public that there is hardly anything about it, that the people do not know. Moreover since 1921 I have worked in such close association with the Congress leaders that I can hardly describe any episode in my life since then without referring to my relations with them. For though Shradhdhanandji, the Deshbandhu, Hakim Sahib and Lalaji are no more with us to-day, we have the good luck to have a host of other veteran Congress leaders still living and working in our midst. The history of the Congress, since the great changes in it that I have described above, is still in the making. And my principal experiments during the past seven years have all been made through the Congress. A reference to my relations with the leaders would therefore be unavoidable, if I set about describing my experiments further. And this I may not do, at any rate for the present, if only for a sense of propriety. Lastly my conclusions from my current experiments can hardly as yet be regarded as decisive. It therefore seems to me to be my plain duty to close this narrative here. In fact my pen instinctively refuses to proceed further.

It is not without a wrench that I have to take leave of the reader. I set a high value on my experiments. I do not know whether I have been able to do justice to them. I can only say that I have spared no pains to give a faithful narrative. To describe truth, as it has appeared to me, and in the exact manner in which I have arrived at it, has been my ceaseless effort. The exercise has given me ineffable mental peace because it has been my fond hope that it might bring faith in Truth and *Ahimsa* to waverers.

My uniform experience has convinced me, that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader, that the only means for the realisation of Truth is *Ahimsa*, I shall dream all my pains in writing these chapters to have been in vain. And, even though my efforts in this behalf may prove fruitless, let the readers

know that the vehicle, not the great principle, is at fault. After all, however sincere my strivings after *Ahimsa* may have been, they have still been imperfect and inadequate. The little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth, can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence. But this much I can say with assurance as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realisation of *Ahimsa*.

*To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics ; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means.*

*Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification ; without self-purification the observance of the law of Ahimsa must remain an empty dream ; God can never be realised by one who is not pure of heart. Self-purification therefore must mean purification in all the walks of life. And purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings.*

*But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action ; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. I know that I have not in me as yet that triple purity in spite of constant ceaseless striving for it. That is why the world's praise fails to move me, indeed it very often stings me. To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms. Ever since my return to India, I have had experiences of the dormant passions lying hidden within me. The knowledge of them has made me feel humiliated but not defeated. The experiences and experiments have sustained me, and given me great joy. But I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse*











